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A HELPING HAND.







*"Tom dragged Binks by the shoulders over to the window."*

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TELETYPE UNIT



# A HELPING HAND



PARADISE STREET

*Page 9*

T. NELSON & SONS



# A HELPING HAND

BY

M. B. SYNGE <sup>K</sup>

*Author of "Jen's Wife," "Granny," "A Child of the Mews,"  
&c. &c.*



J K

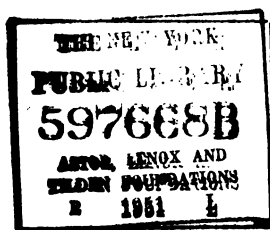
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# A HELPING HAND.

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## CHAPTER I.

### PARADISE STREET.

**I**F you have never been along Paradise Street, let me strongly recommend you not to go. It is the most squally, squabbly, scandalous street you ever were in in your life, and I expect that is saying something.

Dirty? I believe you. Dirtier than anything you ever saw. Smelly? Right again; more so than anything you ever smelt. There was something pathetically funny in its name. Paradise Street indeed! It seemed a mere mockery to call it that, for the street had as bad a name as any street in London. Nobody quite knew why it was so, unless it was that there was such a very obliging publican at the gin-palace at the corner. So all the hard drinkers settled

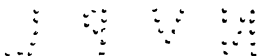
THE END

down there ; and if they were not hard drinkers to begin with, they soon became so, because it happened to be the fashion of the street.

And, naturally enough, when all the money went into the Jolly Dragoons, there was little to spend on the children in the street. What wonder it was squalid and grubby ? But for once in its history it must be remarked that Paradise Street was being washed—not by the occupants of the houses, but by Nature's own clean rain.

The people resented it bitterly. Nature was taking a liberty with their dear, dirty street. A pitiless wind howled down the chimneys, blowing the smoke in all directions, while the rain dashed against the window-panes. In a great many houses the window-panes were no more, and in these cases the rain dashed inside, as if anxious to do a little cleansing there. This idea was frustrated at once by the angry owners of the paneless windows, who indignantly pinned up sheets of grimy newspaper to avoid further insult.

Foaming torrents rushed along the gutters on each side of the pavement, carrying endless pieces of dirty newspaper, cabbage stalks, old shoes, and numerous other treasures that had been accumulating in the



street for months past. Where they went to, no one ever knew, but they disappeared from Paradise Street, and that was the main thing.

The rain continued all day long; indeed it came down harder and harder as the day advanced, and it even continued far into the night. It did not stop the usual exodus to the gin-palace in the evening, however. The men went "because there was such a muddle indoors on a wet day," which meant in Paradise Street that the wives were indoors—on fine days they usually gossiped up and down the street outside. The women went to cheer up their spirits. So the Jolly Dragoons was very full that night, and many a loud laugh rang down the street even above the howling wind.

If you had entered those gloomy, God-forsaken little houses on this particular night, you would only have found the babies in possession. Some of them were crying pitifully enough, poor little things, because the wind frightened them, and the rain poured against the windows, and some of them were so hungry.

Shall I say the truth, though you will hardly believe it, that the money that should have bought the little ones bread was being spent on gin, and the mothers who should have been rocking their fright-

ened babies to sleep were selling their very souls for drink. Thank Heaven, there were a few exceptions. Look into No. 26 ; it is about half-way down on the left-hand side—that is, going from the gin-palace to the corner of the Biffen Road, which runs at right angles to Paradise Street.

There is a mother at home with her baby, or, at any rate, something that cries pitifully in a sort of box on home-made rollers, which she kicks occasionally with her foot.

“Hush, hush, Billy!” she was murmuring; “it’s only the wind and the rain; it won’t hurt Billy. There, go to sleep again, and mother will sing to you.”

In a cracked voice, with yet some remnant of sweetness in it, the woman sang snatches of “Home, Sweet Home,” till the child grew quieter. Suddenly, with a wild gust of wind, it awoke with a cry, and she lifted it on to her knee. It looked little more than a baby, though in reality it was seven years old. It was a little, wasted form, wasted with disease, starved from poor food, half choked with the air of Paradise Street. But it belonged to the woman—it was her child, her own; and beyond that, it was all she had now got to call her own. For it she worked away at starvation wages in her lonely room; for it

she starved herself, that it might have new milk, and sometimes a little bottle of cod-liver oil ; for it she lived her life, now so full of weary regrets for the past.

“ There, there, Billy ! let us tell the naughty rain to go away, and let us go to sleep. Is the pain bad, poor little Billy ? ”

And again she sang to the chorus of the rain and the wind till the weary little child fell asleep ; and, fearful of waking him, she dozed off herself with her precious burden on her knees.

Not for long, however. Too soon the child woke up, this time screaming. She knew another abscess was forming, but she had never seen him in such a state as this. She was really frightened. Laying him down for a moment, she knocked loudly at a little door in the passage. She could hear the rain pouring down outside, but in her agony of mind it mattered little. Was this the end coming ? She had to rap loudly several times before she could get an answer.

“ What do you want ? ”

The words sounded gruff enough ; but the woman did not care.

“ Want ? Tom, you must get up and go to the

doctor to get something for Billy. I'm not sure it ain't the end coming."

"End? Billy?" Whoever Tom was he was awake now. "Missus, you don't think he's dying, do you?" he asked in a muffled voice.

"I tell you I do," murmured the woman impatiently. "Get on your coat, Tom, and be off; I'll give you a dinner free to-morrow, d'ye hear? Only make haste, for God's sake."

The lad needed no second bidding. Like a flash of lightning he was off, out into the dark night, into the blinding rain. Billy was dying. That was enough for him.

But the little life did not flicker out that night. The doctor relieved the agony the child was in, and when the rest of Paradise Street was waking, Billy had just fallen into a natural sleep, while his mother, after a sleepless night, was beginning her work for the day.

The sun shone out brilliantly next morning, filling the whole world with its glory, and even lighting up the great puddles in Paradise Street with a little radiance of their own. The water in the gutter now trickled slowly down its course; the pavements were almost dry from the wind; the moist pieces

of newspaper had mostly been unpinned from the paneless windows, and the street soon resumed its animation.

Now there were fifty houses in Paradise Street. That means a vast number of women. Now it had rained for nearly twenty-four hours; so there had been practically no gossip for all that time, except, of course, at the gin-palace. But then that does not count. You see the men are there too, and the conversation runs on different lines. At least this was the case in Paradise Street.

Accordingly, all these women's tongues had been practically silent for twenty-four hours. Is there any need to say more? The world would indeed be coming to an end if they had nothing to talk about now, and indeed it would be quite impossible to chronicle all the topics they managed to touch upon.

But one topic had gained ground and seemed to be very popular, and though I acknowledge second-hand gossip is a trifle slow, I want you particularly to hear what the neighbours in Paradise Street spent their precious time in discussing—time which might have been profitably spent in mending a little and cleaning a little. But somehow mending and cleaning were at a discount in Paradise Street. When the

children's clothes no longer held together, the rags were thrown into the street, where they lay till the rain or a scavenger removed them.

The conversation began at the end of the street, at No. 1, which is right against the gin-palace, the Jolly Dragoons.

"So Mrs. Harvey turned her lodger out last night, did she?" began the lady in possession of No. 1, in a half-inquiring, half-decided voice.

She was accosting one of her neighbours who lived a little way up the other side—Mrs. Temple of No. 23.

"Did she now?" replied Mrs. Temple, a very stout lady with a baby in her arms. "That's the noise I heard, was it then?—You heard it too, didn't you, Mrs. Thorn?" she added, addressing a young woman with a swollen face who was standing at her door.

"Noise, bless you! I should think there were a noise. Enough to wake up any Christian. First I thought it were Dick Badges coming back from the Jolly Dragoons, but even he don't kick up such a row as I heard coming from Mrs. Harvey's, and she pretending to be that quiet and respectable-like. It's them sort, I sez, are the deep ones; you never knows what they be about.—Here, you live next door, Mrs. Bovill. What do you put it down to?"

"Lodger was drunk," answered Mrs. Bovill in a solid voice, as if, for all she cared, this might conclude the business.

"I always thought him a bad lot," said Mrs. Perkins, who had as long a tongue and as fertile an imagination as any in Paradise Street. "They do say he swears awful at that poor little boy, afflicted as he is. It's a shame—I call it a shame, I do."

"Serve him right to turn him out into all that wet and rain then. I didn't think the woman had spirit enough for that; seems so cowed-like when she walks down the street; wants a pick-me-up at the corner; put new life into her, that would," added Mrs. Temple, though it was open to question how much "new life" she had put into herself by her nocturnal visits to the Jolly Dragoons.

"I *have* heard," said Mrs. Wicks, and her voice was low and mysterious—"I have heard say that there's something queer about that lodger, Tom."

Now there was always supposed to be "something queer" with everybody who did not exactly follow the daily routine of the inhabitants of Paradise Street.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Wicks, "I met him on the drink one night, and, on my word, in rags as he was, if he didn't take out a silk handkerchief out of his

pocket. 'That's come from West-end ways,' sez I to myself, and looked hard at him."

Now the first part of this statement was a falsehood, with no foundation whatever; the silk handkerchief episode rested on a suspicion.

"Has any one seen Mrs. Harvey since last night?" asked Mrs. Temple.

"No," answered her next-door neighbour, "I did hear she was so much upset by the perlice and the whole turn out that she is quite done up to-day. My 'usband see two men at the door as late as twelve o'clock, only he couldn't recognize 'em. Pourin' cats and dogs it was, too, he said. Depend on it, 'twas the perlice though."

"There ye're wrong, then," answered Mrs. Thorn. "I happen to ha' been doin' a little shoppin' last night, and meetin' a friend made me a little late, so I was comin' down the street about twelve o'clock, and there was no perlice about then."

They all knew where Mrs. Thorn's "shop" was, and where the friend had detained her, but no one alluded to the Jolly Dragoons.

"Well," said Mrs. Bovill, as if again to conclude the whole matter, "I call it a shame to turn out a young man, whoever he be, on such a night as it was—rain and

wind ; bless you, it wasn't fit for any Christian to have their nose outside."

Mrs. Bovill must have forgotten her own nose, which it is to be supposed accompanied her back from the gin-palace at the corner, notwithstanding the rain and the wind.

They continued to discuss the subject for the greater part of the afternoon ; even those who were within doors stitching at waistcoats or shirts joined in the animated discussion. And yet they arrived at no satisfactory conclusions, except that Mrs. Harvey was not as quiet and respectable as she seemed ; that she starved that poor little cripple child of hers ; and that it was a precious good thing she had turned the lodger away, even though it had been done on a cruel night when the rain must soak through rags and a silk handkerchief, and even though there was an element of interest attached to the doings of the mysterious Tom.

Meanwhile Mrs. Harvey stitched on at the shirts, as if the gossips were not busy with her name, and as if she had not been up all night with her sick child. His screams still rang in her ears, as they seemed to pierce the night ; but he was still sleeping, wearied out with his night of pain, though every now and again he turned and moaned in his sleep.

Suddenly Tom entered—entered so softly that Mrs. Harvey scarcely turned. A broad smile beamed on his thin face.

“I’ve got something for him,” said Tom in a whisper. “Look, missus. What! still asleep is he, poor little chap?”

Tom took out of his ragged pocket a small paper bag, from the recesses of which he produced two sponge-cakes.

“He’ll like that, won’t he, missus?”

Mrs. Harvey smiled.

“How did you get ’em, Tom?” she asked anxiously.

“It’s all right, missus. I held a horse for a chap up Tottenham Court Road, and he gave me sixpence; so I went straight off into a grub shop, and I said, ‘Give me something plain for a little chap with no digestion.’ And they gave me these—two for three halfpence. And, listen. I believe I shall get work on Monday, if I can only get a tidy coat. I’m to call and see the manager Friday night, here just round the corner in Biffen Road. Then we shall swim again, never fear.”

At this moment, whether Tom raised his voice a little with excitement at the prospect of work, or whether a momentary pain pierced through the un-

consciousness of sleep, I know not, but Billy woke and opened his weary, little eyes.

As they rested on Tom, he smiled and held out his wasted arms. Tom was leaning over the wooden box in which he lay in a moment, and soon lifted him up with as much care as his mother, while the child clung to him with confidence.

"There, Billy's better to-day," he said cheerfully; "and see what Tom has brought him. There, Billy; open the bag."

Billy's weak, little fingers took the bag, but he soon gave it back to Tom.

"Tom do it," he whispered feebly; "Billy don't want nothink to eat."

"Oh yes, he does," said Tom, drawing out a sponge-cake and eyeing it hungrily himself. "See, Billy; taste it."

The child took a tiny bite and pushed it away.

"Billy don't like 'em."

Tom looked disappointed.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Harvey; "he'll eat it soaked in a little milk; he's not quite awake yet."

And she was right, for in a minute the eyelids had closed, and the child was asleep on Tom's knee.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE GOSSIP'S MISCHIEF.

MRS. HARVEY had lived in the upper rooms of 26 Paradise Street for upwards of five years, just she and her little cripple boy. Gossip had been busy with her husband, as you may readily imagine. First of all, he didn't exist, they said. You must have noticed through life that gossip always *begins* by putting the most *unkind* interpretation on every action. Well, then, this was the hardest thing that could be said of quiet Mrs. Harvey; and having been thoroughly stigmatized as one who had no right to the cripple child, Mrs. Temple had spoken up. *She* knew all about them. There *was* a Mr. Harvey—of course there was; how stupid and unobservant they all were; why, he had actually been to the house, and there had been words, and he had left suddenly.

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"What was he like?"

"Why, a tall man with short, black beard, rather stout, and red in the face."

"Did he look like an artisan?"

"Why, yes; what else should he be?"

Mrs. Temple, rather run into a corner at this question, considering she had never seen this Mr. Harvey, and only had the information third hand through Mrs. Thorn and a Mrs. Brown in Biffen Road, refused to be questioned further on the mysterious man Harvey, pleaded work, and retired from *that* conversation.

But no sooner had she gone than along the street saunters Mrs. Bovill. "What's that you're saying? the man Harvey? Bless you, don't you know about him? He's undergoing penal servitude; that's where he is. I only wish Bovill was, that's all," she added, with a sigh, as she meditated on Mrs. Harvey's enviable lot; "and I daresay she don't half appreciate her blessings. People don't mostly know when they're well off;" and with another heart-rending upheaval of her ample bosom, she moved on.

Nevertheless, this new version of Mr. Harvey's whereabouts was not satisfactory by any means to all; each had their own idea of him. He was a shoemaker in Islington, and they had separated after

a quarrel; he was an undertaker up West-end ways; he had emigrated to America, having seen better days, and absconded with some money. I don't know what he wasn't, poor man. But what and where the man Harvey really was, was known to his wife alone, at any rate in these parts. Billy thought his father was dead. And it was better so.

Now, it was Saturday night in Paradise Street, and as usual the Jolly Dragoons was full to overflowing, and the talk was loud and furious as the hours drew on. The topic of Mrs. Harvey's lodger, Tom, having been turned out of her house that wet night was freely discussed, and was still being discussed by Bill Thorn and his wife on their way home, when the manager of the Wholesale Clothing Company in Biffen Road met them. Possibly rumours of the story had reached his ears.

"Is there any truth in this statement about this Tom?" he asked of Bill Thorn, one of his workers.

"Ask the missus," was Bill's answer.

"Nothing beyond the fact that he was so drunk he had to be turned out by the perlice into the street on that awful Thursday night," said Mrs. Thorn gaily, with confident superiority.

"That's it, is it?" said Binks. "The young man

won't suit *me*, then," he added ; " no drinking for me in the clothing establishment," and he looked at Bill Thorn and laughed.

If Mrs. Thorn's heart misgave her for a moment, she soon forgot what she had said, and little enough idea had she of the wide-spread trouble her careless words were to cause.

Monday morning came, and Tom punctually presented himself before the manager of the Wholesale Clothing Company in Biffen Road.

He had got a new coat somehow or other, and looked comparatively neat, compared with what he had been. A smile beamed on his face. He was going to try so hard to keep his place, now he had got it—not an easy thing to get with no character. But here was his first start ; a week more, and he would have money in his pocket. Then he could repay Mrs. Harvey for all her kindness, and little Billy should be fed on the delicacies he so needed.

It was a drizzling wet morning, but what did Tom care as he waited outside impatiently for the doors to open. He went in with the others. Suddenly Mr. Binks appeared, and catching him by the arm, drew him aside while the other men passed to their work.

"No room here for *you*," he said roughly; "must find work elsewhere."

Tom opened his eyes in utter astonishment.

"But you engaged me," he muttered at last, realizing his situation.

"Yes, on a wrong understanding," said Binks. "I should have let you know Saturday, but didn't know where to find you."

"But—but I gave you my number," said Tom, dimly discerning that there must be a mistake somewhere.

"I've no time to argue," rejoined Binks angrily. "There, you can go," and pushing him out of the door, the manager closed it noisily, and Tom found himself standing in the street alone.

Like one in a dream he staggered against the wall, sick and giddy; he could hardly realize his position. The rain was more than a drizzle now, and dark clouds betokened a wet day.

"My God," he murmured desperately, "have I not suffered enough yet? Stay Thy hand and be merciful unto Thy servant."

One of the Clothing Company servants passed him; it was Bill Thorn, a little late for his work.

"What! drunk at *this* hour in the morning?

Mrs. Harvey was quite right, then, and has more spirit than we credited her with."

Mrs. Harvey? Drunk? What did he mean? There was some mistake somewhere. Surely Mrs. Harvey had not been gossiping about him; she would never tell his previous story in Paradise Street—a street they both loathed and detested, and only lived there because rents were so remarkably low. Couldn't he even trust Mrs. Harvey, who had been a mother to him ever since—yes, ever since that awful day? He shuddered.

"I can't go back to her without work," he said, half aloud. "I can't live on her any longer; and if she has been talking about me, well, the sooner I leave Paradise Street the better."

He turned disconsolately. Suddenly a thought struck him.

"Billy! Oh, the little chap will miss me, and I—I shall not know how he is."

He turned again irresolutely, and then from love to the child he resolved to practise a bit of deception on Mrs. Harvey. He would go back at dinner-time, just to see them both again, and he would not say that he had been turned off without so much as an honest trial; then he would leave his new coat to be

sold, and creep away in his rags—away, away anywhere, back to the old life perhaps. How could one be good in such a hard world, where every man's hand seemed against one, where those one trusted most proved to be untrue? It was easier to do evil. So argued the wretched boy, for he was little more, being barely eighteen at this time. He had tried so hard to do better, too. Will no one help him? is there none to stretch forth a friendly hand and save him from this abyss of despair?

When the dinner hour arrived he returned to No. 26.

"Well?," said Mrs. Harvey, looking up inquiringly; "how have you got on, Tom?"

"Oh," answered Tom lamely, "work's work; one don't expect to 'get on' in a few hours. How's Billy?"

"Billy's better," answered the child, holding out his arms to be lifted up; "and we've got smoked 'addock for dinner. That's cos you've got work, Tom; and mother sez we'll get bloater one day. Billy does love bloater, more than Tom, and more than mother, more than anythink else in the world—just bloater skin."

Billy licked his thin lips at the rapturous thought.

Tom looked at the wasted form intently; he loved

every bone in that little body. And the little chap yearned for a bloater, did he—at least, just the skin of a bloater? It wasn't much to ask.

Tom ate his share of smoked haddock very silently, and set Mrs. Harvey wondering at his want of appetite and his vacant air. "He'll be all right in a day or two when he gets accustomed to his work," she thought to herself.

When he was done Tom sat still.

"You mustn't be late for your work, Tom; it only wants ten minutes of two."

Tom started. "Yes, I must be off," he said quickly.—"Here, Billy; have got a kiss for old Tom? He'll bring you bloater skin one day."

Billy stretched out his arms and flung them round Tom's neck. And then, with something very near a choke, and with great tears glistening in his eyes, he almost darted from the room. One moment in his cupboard, for his room was little more, to change his coat, to leave a pencil scrawl in the pocket, and he was gone—gone from the only kind friend he possessed; gone from the only place he could call a home; gone out, as it were, into the darkness; once more alone in a world he had found so full of temptation.

Tea-time came, and Mrs. Harvey had made the tea and cut the bread. There was no butter to-day—had they not had smoked haddock for dinner? She always wanted her cup of tea early, and Billy wanted his. He had been fretful and in pain that afternoon. So, tea over, she put down the teapot to keep hot on a little oil stove she had got, in default of a coal fire.

"I daresay Tom'll be a little late to-day, Billy," she said, when six o'clock had struck and he had not come in. "Would Billy like to sit up against the window and look for him?"

Billy nodded his head. Mrs. Harvey wrapped him up in an old shawl, and propped him up against the window.

But the evening was dark and cold, and the child soon got tired. Seven o'clock, eight o'clock, and no Tom.

Billy was crying by this time, half in pain, and half because he wanted Tom. Mrs. Harvey put down her work, and throwing up the window, looked up and down the long street.

Paradise Street was pretty quiet; the night was drizzling and dark; the few gas lamps flickered and sputtered.

There was no sign of Tom.

She came back, undressed Billy, and put him to bed. He was soon asleep; and then, throwing the old shawl over her head, she went out.

It was a most unusual thing for her to do. Except when she took her shirts back to Mr. Binks once a week, when Tom sat with the child, she rarely went outside. Tom mostly used to get the few things they wanted, or she got them on the way back from Biffen Road. But to go out into Paradise Street, and after dark, was almost an unheard-of thing.

She went straight across to Mrs. Thorn's. Mrs. Thorn was just starting for the Jolly Dragoons.

"Can I speak to you a moment?" said Mrs. Harvey.

"Of course you can; it's a free country," said Mrs. Thorn. "I was just going to shop—a little tea and sugar, you know. Bill is such a one for tea."

"Your husband works for Binks, doesn't he?"

"Yes, he do; and a good employer is Binks, too," answered Mrs. Thorn.

"Did he happen to allude to my lodger, the young man Tom?"

Mrs. Thorn coughed slightly. Here was a pretty pickle. Was Tom lodging with Mrs. Harvey still,

and had he never been turned away? Oh yes; turned away, and then returned and was forgiven, probably. That was it. Mrs. Harvey looked a "softie." However, truth was best, when you could speak it.

"He was turned off from Binks's early this morning," said Mrs. Thorn. "Didn't he tell you?"

Mrs. Harvey turned white, and put her hand to the table to steady herself. She was weak as a cat from want of good food, poor soul, and anxiety about her cripple child.

"But—but he came back to dinner," she faltered; "and he never told me then."

It was an unwise admission; but the woman was off her guard. Mrs. Thorn took in every word.

"Bad lot, that Tom; she's well rid of him. I s'pose he paid her for that cupboard he slept in, and that's what she's taking on about."

"Is that all you know?" asked Mrs. Harvey, recovering herself.

No, Mrs. Thorn knew more. Mrs. Harvey had better know at once what sort of a young man was this Tom. There was no need to withhold further news.

"My Bill told me he saw him standing against a

wall this morning, and—he had been drinking; that's all I know."

"Drinking?" cried Mrs. Harvey. "Are you quite sure?"

"Bill ain't often wrong on these subjects," said Mrs. Thorn.

There was no more to say. She turned to go.

"Stop, Mrs. Harvey; why don't you come along with me and cheer yer spirits up? A bit down on yer luck you are. And it's possible we might meet Bill there, and he can tell you hisself about Tom. Do you worlds of good. I tell you you sits moping up there all day along with that sick child of yours. I know what it is, I tell yer. I had one, a girl she was, and she suffered something cru-ul, till she was took; and oh, the relief! I had put her in the insurance society, so I didn't lose by her; but she used to mope me to death nearly with her groans and cries. It'll be a mercy when yours is took too, missus."

To Mrs. Harvey each word was like a sword thrust. She knew what Billy's death would mean to *her*—a great blank world, with nothing to live for, nothing to love. The child, cripple as he was, was her very life.

"Thank you, Mrs. Thorn," she said, as she opened

the door to go. "I think I'll be going back to Billy; he may be waking, and find me gone. Good-night, and thank you."

"Don't mention it," said Mrs. Thorn. "I'm sure you're welcome."

Welcome to what, I wonder? The news, half true, half untrue, about Tom? Mrs. Harvey could think of nothing else as she crossed the wet street and mounted the rickety stairs to her lonely attic.

Tom—Tom had been turned away early in the morning, he had deceived her at dinner, and he had been drinking. Was it that that made him so queer and abstracted at dinner; he ate almost nothing. Had he been drinking? He had no money, she knew, unless he had pawned his new coat; nothing else in his possession would fetch a penny. As this idea struck her, she lit a candle and went into his room. No; there lay his coat thrown down on his mattress. She took it up, and as she did so, a piece of paper fell out of one of the pockets. She took it up, and by the light of her flickering dip she read:—

"DEAR MISSUS,—I am turned off. No reason given. I cannot come back to you. Sell my coat and get Billy a bloater, and take what money it will

fetch. Thank you, missus, for all your kindness to me. Some day I will repay it.

TOM."

So he was really gone—gone without even telling her or consulting her. Where was he this wet night, without even his new coat to protect him? Had he gone back to the old life? Heaven forbid.

Down by the mattress, with her elbows on Tom's coat, she knelt, and burying her face in it, she cried aloud to the Father of all to be merciful to the boy.

She could do no more work to-night. Billy turned restlessly as she entered the room. He must have been dreaming, for he suddenly half sat up in his sleep, and stretching out both his arms, he cried, "Tom, Tom, come back to Billy!"

## CHAPTER III.

### TOM'S DOWNFALL.

MEANWHILE Mrs. Thorn was hastening along to her "shop," simply bursting with the information she had received first hand about the mysterious Tom. On the way she overtook Mrs. Wicks.

"Mrs. Harvey has just been in for a chat," said Mrs. Thorn, joining her neighbour and walking by her side.

It is strange how truth may be perverted. It was a well-known fact that Mrs. Harvey never did go into any of the houses to gossip away her time; and though she was condemned for it, called "stuck up" and proud, yet in the innermost recesses of their hearts the others admired her industry and perseverance. There was something a little superior about her that really won their regard; and Mrs. Thorn was

not a little proud that *she* should have been chosen to receive a visit from her hold-off neighbour. Wherefore she made the most of it.

"And what did she want?" asked Mrs. Wicks, seeing through Mrs. Thorn's carefully-worded announcement. "I hear her lodger has been properly turned off *this* time."

"There, Bill has been talking again," cried Mrs. Thorn, in a vexed voice, burning with indignation that he had been before her with this choice piece of information. "It is strange how he can't keep nothink to hisself. What did *you* hear?"

"Why, that Tom had been engaged by Binks for Monday morning, but Binks heard on Saturday night about his being turned out, and the perlice. Then it seems things was made worse by Tom stealin' a coat, there, right from Binks hisself—the audacity of 'im. Monday morning he comes punctual to work, and Binks meets 'im and turns 'im right away. He didn't say nothink about the perlice or the coat, which was very generous of Binks, but tells 'im to go. Then he went and sold his coat for drink—the audacity of 'im; and next time he was seen in his old rags down Biffen Road, in the opposite direction from Binks's, but he wasn't walkin' very steady, they say."

"Oh," said Mrs. Thorn; "so you heard that, did you?"

"Yes; isn't that what Mrs. Harvey told you?" inquired Mrs. Wicks, having finished her circumstantial story.

"Oh ye—es," answered Mrs. Thorn, agonized at not having been first with the story of the coat. It didn't quite agree with Bill's story, but that was no matter. "Oh yes; that was deep of 'im about the coat, wasn't it? They knew it was one of Binks's coats by the spotted lining."

This was a brilliant addition to the story, and it showed Mrs. Thorn had really heard the right way of the case.

"What else did Mrs. Harvey say?" asked Mrs. Wicks, deeply interested.

"Oh, I shouldn't like to repeat what she sez in confidence to *me*," answered Mrs. Thorn in a low voice. "I don't mind telling you *one* thing she told me." (Observe, it was the only thing Mrs. Harvey *had* said.) "Why, it seems Tom went back to dinner; and it was a smoked 'addock they had to-day, for I see Mrs. Harvey take it in at the door; and he never so much as told her he was turned off from Binks's, but just pretended, he did, that he

must go back to work after dinner—the deep 'un. I wonder she took 'im back, having turned 'im away once. But there were somethink takin' about Tom, I always thought. He were kind to our Jeremiah one day, when he were near run over against the Mitre there, and Tom took 'im up and carried 'im 'ome to me. So frightened were Jeremiah, he nearly shrieked his little inside out; and having had the fits once, I puts 'im straight into a hot bath, lest he should have 'em agen. And when I looked round, there Tom were gone, and I never see 'im to thank 'im, and I don't s'pose we'll ever see 'im agen now. But there's no doubt Jeremiah would ha' been killed dead if it hadn't been for that Tom; so you see it's natural-like that Mrs. Harvey should feel friendly-like toward me."

It was difficult to see the connection of ideas; but Mrs. Wicks did not argue the point, and together they entered the Jolly Dragons.

And Tom? What was he doing and how was he faring, all unconscious as he was of the reasons for his sudden dismissal from Binks's. He would have taken steps to discover the reason of such injustice, had he not had lurking suspicions that somehow or other Mrs. Harvey had let fall something about his

past life that had come to the ears of Binks, and determined him to have nothing more to say to such a scoundrel.

And yet Tom did not seem a scoundrel. There was a look of refined intelligence in his face. There was none of that degradation that marks the man with generations of inherited vice behind him. Had Tom been dressed as a gentleman, you would have declared without hesitation that he *was* a gentleman. But even in his rags, with his shaggy hair hanging about his ears, and his hat distinctly the worse for wear, there was something in his frank eyes that was eminently attractive.

And no wonder, for Tom's father had been a gentleman—*had been*, for though yet alive, he was no gentleman now. Down, down, down he had come, through drink—down from a good position, from a happy home, from all that makes life happy and good. He had broken his old father's heart; and his mother, thank Heaven, was dead. An only son, who should have inherited a small estate in Suffolk, he had been disinherited; and now his whereabouts was not even known to his old father. Then had come his marriage with a young professional singer, and the subsequent birth of Tom. To his father Tom

was but a useless encumbrance. So one fine day he took the child, travelled down to Marlowe, tied a note round the child's neck, and pushed him in at the front door of his father's house. Then he departed quickly, lest he might be seen, back to his professional singer and back to his drink.

The old butler, Ashton, found the child in the hall weeping bitterly. He looked up at Ashton with his brown eyes in a confiding way and dried his tears.

"Ganfather," he lisped—"ganfather, I's come to live with you, please ; no one don't want me."

Ashton looked down from his dignified height to this small piece of humanity. Then seeing the note tied on, he cut the string, placed the note on a silver tray, and taking hold of the child's somewhat grubby little hand, led him into the study, where his master, Mr. Courton, sat at his writing-table.

He had a great dislike to being disturbed in the morning, as a rule ; but at this particular moment it was rather a relief, as he had lost his spectacles—a not uncommon occurrence.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I have just found this."

Mr. Courton looked round quickly.

"Found my glasses ?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Ashton. "Found a note and this—child."

"Child!" almost screamed Mr. Courton. "Take it away, Ashton, take it away at once, and go and look for my glasses."

But Ashton persevered. He knew his master's quick temper.

"Ganfather," said little Tom, looking up at Ashton—"ganfather, I's come to live with you, please, and I'm very hung'y."

"Take it away!" repeated Mr. Courton. "How can I read a note without my glasses?"

And Ashton retreated with the child holding on to his finger.

It was not long before little Tom was installed at Marlowe Hall, and he soon found his way into the old man's affections, when he discovered that Ashton was not his grandfather.

The child, young as he was, delighted in the old house and all the ease and luxury with which he was surrounded.

When he was old enough, from a preparatory school he passed on to a public school. He was a bright, clever boy, and his grandfather was proud of him. He brought him forward on every occasion.

The boy would dine late with the old man and sip his valuable wines, till the love of them grew on him. His father's weakness was born in him, and he followed in his father's steps.

When his grandfather discovered that what he had deemed one or two youthful indiscretions had become a confirmed habit, he was very wrathful. The old man had a hot temper and an exaggerated family pride.

"The next offence, Tom, I shall turn you out, neck and crop, do you hear?" he thundered one night.

"I shall save you that trouble, grandfather," answered the boy loftily.

Next morning he was gone—gone just as his father had gone, away he knew not where, just to drink in peace when the madness of drink was upon him.

Now, as he walked on down street after street, he thought of that March morning in Suffolk when he had left his grandfather's house in deep disgrace. Then he was a well-dressed gentleman; now he was just a ragged lad, reduced to destitution through the curse of England—drink. Yet he had not tasted drink for six months now.

Hear the rest of his story. He soon pawned his tidy clothes, for he had not much money about him when he left his grandfather's house; and for some weeks he had wandered about, going from bad to worse, when one night he was feeling very miserable standing at the corner by the Charing Cross Hospital.

Now it happened that evening that Mrs. Harvey was fetching Billy away from the hospital, where he had been for some weeks past, undergoing operations for his abscesses, when she caught sight of Tom standing there with two or three others.

Mrs. Harvey recognized him at once, for she had lived on his grandfather's estate in Suffolk, when she was married to Harvey, one of the under-keepers.

"Master Tom!" she exclaimed, almost involuntarily.

Tom heard his name and turned quickly round. But he only saw a respectable-looking woman wheeling a sickly child, and he turned away again.

"Master Tom," she repeated, this time louder.

Again he turned, but no sign of recognition passed his face.

"Do you remember Harvey, once keeper at Marlowe?" she whispered, going close up to him, and growing very red as she spoke.

He shook his head.

"I am Harvey's wife," she repeated. "You are ill; come back with me, Master Tom."

It was so refreshing to hear his name again—the name that connected him with his past life. He was confused and his head was giddy; his will was gone and childlike he turned and walked by her.

"Master Tom," she said in a low voice, "it is very sad to see you here like this. What has happened to you?"

"I've been on the drink," he said, with his old candour.

She looked at him pityingly. Could she help him? What could she do, almost too poor to feed herself and her child? How could she offer anything to this lad—the squire's grandson too?

He was walking along by the perambulator; she noticed his feet were almost through his shoes.

"Where are you sleeping to-night?" she asked presently.

"Nowhere," he answered. "I haven't got a penny on me," he added in despair.

"Would you like to come back with me? There is a sort of cupboard on the stairs you could sleep in if you liked, Master Tom."

"Don't call me master," he cried in an agonized voice. "I have sunk too low—too low."

They walked on in silence till they reached Paradise Street. It is not very far from the Charing Cross Hospital.

Mrs. Harvey took out her key, and they went in. She took Billy out of the perambulator and carried him up; he moaned piteously at the change of movement, and moaned again as she laid him on her bed.

"Come in," she said, as Tom hesitated outside the door. "Come in and have a cup of tea anyhow."

"You're very kind," he murmured gratefully. "I wonder why."

"Because you're in trouble," she answered. "You're in great trouble, and I want to help you, if I may."

"Nobody else has tried to help me," he half sobbed.

She did not answer, but hastened to get tea ready. The tea had no milk or sugar, and the bread was thinly scraped over with butter; but to Tom it was welcome enough. He had not tasted a cup of tea since he left his grandfather's house. He swallowed it down almost greedily, and ate all the bread and butter that she could spare him.

Billy would eat and drink nothing.

"They give me nice milk at the 'orspital," he

moaned, "and not tea; take it all away; I don't want nothink."

"The little chap looks bad," said Tom, after a time.

"He *is* very bad," answered Mrs. Harvey, "but better than when he went into the hospital; they feed him better than I can."

Tom shyly sidled nearer the child, and it stopped its moaning to look at him. Something about him attracted it, and it put out its thin arms for him to lift it up.

"It looks as if it would break in two, missus," he said. "Shall I take him up?"

"Yes, do," answered Mrs. Harvey.

And this was the first acquaintance between Tom and Billy.

Suddenly Tom got up.

"I must go now, missus; thank you."

"Where to?" asked Mrs. Harvey, who had her suspicions that the craving for drink was on him.

"Oh, anywhere, nowhere," he said vaguely. "Only I'll not burden you here."

"You shall *not* go out to-night," said Mrs. Harvey sternly. "You will stay here and sleep, if you can, in the cupboard on the stairs; it will be better than the open air. Tom. Master Tom," she added, with

tears in her eyes, "give it up; don't go drinking any more; you're killing yourself. You *can* give it up now; the time will come when you *cannot* give it up, when it has got fast hold of you. You are so young, and all your life is before you."

Then she added in a lower voice: "Remember Harvey."

Tom was astonished at this sudden outburst. No one had spoken to him like this; no one seemed to care whether he drank or not. His grandfather had stormed at him, but never tried to help him. He had allowed the temptation to grow on him; now here was some one asking him to give it up, to pull himself together and be a man. Surely it was impossible.

He thought for some time before he answered. Then suddenly standing up, a look of strong resolution crossing his pale face, he cried aloud,—

"I will do it, missus; I will give it up. I will not go back to that cursed drink. It has made me miserable, it has dragged me low. I will try to get work; and as time goes on, I will redeem my character, and go back to my grandfather again."

"That's right, Tom," answered Mrs. Harvey, her voice trembling with joy; "may you be strong."

## CHAPTER IV.

### MRS. HARVEY SPEAKS OUT.

WHEN Mrs. Harvey woke next morning it was with a vague feeling that something had happened, and she could not quite remember what. Billy's first question settled that quick enough.

"Mother, did Tom come back after I'd got asleep?"

That was it. Tom had gone. Slowly the proceedings of the day before came back to her. He had first deceived her, and then he had been drinking, and he had never come back. There was yet a chance that he might return in the morning when he had recovered himself.

"No, Billy, Tom never came back last night. Perhaps he will come to-day. Billy must sit at the window and watch for him."

Tears welled up into Billy's dark eyes.

"Billy wants Tom to come back," he half cried.

"Never mind, darling ; Tom will come back some day," she said confidently. "He will come back to Billy."

Still Billy remained uncomforted, and insisted on spending the morning with his little nose flattened against the window pane, looking for Tom to come back, till his back ached, and his mother had to lay him down. She could not help reviling Tom a little for causing Billy such trouble. Oh, why had he left her like this—left without even a good-bye.

As the afternoon wore on, and there were no signs of him, she determined to go out and make some inquiries ; but Billy was restless, and she did not like to leave him. At last she made up her mind to get Mrs. Thorn to come in and sit with him for half an hour, while she went out. Mrs. Thorn had obliged her that way once before, and she was generally pretty sober so early in the day.

Mrs. Thorn was delighted ; she took it as a favour that she should be chosen, and she was not without her hopes that she might by this means unravel more about the mysterious Tom.

"You seems mighty keen on this lodger of yours," she ventured, as they crossed the street together.

"Yes," said Mrs. Harvey. "I *am* keen he should

not take to drink again. He has kept his word for six months."

"Oh," thought Mrs. Thorn, "that's the sort, is it? I better take care what I'm about. Shouldn't wonder if she took to preachin' at me."

"There, Billy; Mrs. Thorn'll stop with you a bit while I go to look for Tom, and if you're a good boy perhaps I may bring him back."

So saying, she went out into Paradise Street to begin her search and her inquiries. Beginning at the Jolly Dragoons, she made her way down Biffen Road, and so on to Charing Cross, down the back streets, in and out of the public-houses, now taking a friendly policeman into her confidence, now staring hard at groups of boys and men to see whether perchance Tom's familiar face might be seen among them. But no; her efforts were crowned with no success. London was such a great city, how should she ever hope to find him?

Wearily she dragged herself home, and with a last despairing look up and down Paradise Street she entered her own room.

Billy had fallen asleep. Mrs. Thorn had fallen asleep too, and was snoring heavily as Mrs. Harvey entered. The opening of the door woke her.

"Not found him, I s'pose," she said, as she rubbed her eyes and sat up. "Not likely to either if he's gone off on the spree. He'll come back when it's over, never you fear. I should get another lodger, if I was you; the money's all the same, whoever you get."

Mrs. Thorn would never have believed it if Mrs. Harvey had told her that Tom paid nothing for that cupboard; he only handed her every penny he earned partly to pay for his food and partly to prevent his being able to drink.

To take him in out of pure kindness of heart, as Mrs. Harvey had done, with no motive further, was an idea quite beyond Mrs. Thorn's intellect to understand. Every one had motives in Paradise Street, and very distinct motives too. If *they* took in a lodger, it was for the money he gave them—a little extra to spend in drink. Then this was just in Paradise Street, where morals were low. They seemed to have forgotten somehow about a Christ who had once lived on earth to show men *how* to live.

"By the way, Mrs. Harvey, your Tom must have forgotten himself a bit over that coat of his," said Mrs. Thorn, somewhat questioningly.

"Coat? Tom? What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Harvey quickly.

"Why, I s'pose he's been deceivin' you on that point, has he? Didn't you know it was stolen?"

"Stolen!" cried Mrs. Harvey, a red flush spreading over her white face. "Mrs. Thorn, how *can* you say such a thing?" Then suddenly she put her hand up to her head. "O God, is it possible?" she half murmured. "I gave him his money, and he told me he had got it second hand. Is it possible Tom was lying to me then?"

"Depend on it, he was," said Mrs. Thorn, straining forward to catch every word; "depend on it, he spent the money in drink, and that's why he went off in such a hurry. It was one of Binks's make, I hear."

Mrs. Harvey did not answer. The plot was thickening. Tom was appearing in his true light. And she had believed in him too. Yet how could she believe in him now, in the face of such evidence? Everything, everything was against him.

Mrs. Thorn rose to go. Perhaps she had done mischief enough for one afternoon.

"Well, I shouldn't worrit about the young rascal any more, if I was you, Mrs. Harvey; get another lodger, and you'll find the money's the same."

"It isn't the *money*," replied Mrs. Harvey; "it's the lad himself I worry about. I can't bear he should go back to the drink."

"Oh, there now, you're too strict with him, Mrs. Harvey; it's natural he should want to do as the others do sometimes. Why, you should see my Thomas, only eleven years old. I found him in the Jolly Dragoons the other day drinking away at gin like a man, he was; and upon my word I could hardly get him 'ome for laughing, such a little fool as he made hisself."

Mrs. Harvey's blood boiled within her.

"Mrs. Thorn," she cried warmly, "you should be ashamed of yourself. It is horrible, horrible to think of! What will that little lad grow up to? I tell you I would sooner see my child stretched dead before me than I would see him grow up a drunkard—a child drunkard. You don't know what you are doing. Oh, save him before it is too late, Mrs. Thorn; for the sake of a merciful God, save the child from his father's fate."

Mrs. Thorn was furious.

"I'll thank you to mind your own business, Mrs. Harvey," she said, making towards the door. "I suppose I know how to bring up children as well as

you do, having had ten to your one starveling. If you're too good for Paradise Street, you better go elsewhere ; you'll not make Paradise Street good, so there."

Without even bidding her good-night, Mrs. Thorn banged the door, and took her departure hastily.

"The idea of her speaking to me like that, the *idea*," she murmured to herself as she strode angrily across the street. "No wonder Tom left her first opportunity, as it were, and she believing in 'im all along. She's a softie, she is."

And yet those words of Mrs. Harvey made more impression on Mrs. Thorn than she would have allowed.

"What will that little lad grow up to?" The words came back to her unpleasantly more than once in the course of the evening. But what right had that woman Harvey to speak to her like that; and further, to speak words which she could not lightly dismiss? Was it possible that she, Mrs. Thorn, was not doing all she ought by her children? She sent them to school, when she did not want them at home, and when they had a certain amount of clothes to go in; she fed them a certain amount, when the money was not all spent; she mostly put them to bed before she turned out for her evening's amusement. Was there a mother

in Paradise Street who did more for her offspring than this? What would that woman Harvey have her to do? She had no business to speak like that, no business at all. Let each mind her own business; that was the best rule in life.

She flung her shawl over her head with an indignant swing, and went down the street to Mrs. Temple to tell her the "latest."

Mrs. Temple was more sympathetic, certainly.

"And she actually called you in and told you how to manage your own children. Well, I never did—no, I never *did*," laughed Mrs. Temple uproariously. "The impertinence of her! And is that little cripple thing all she can show for herself? No wonder Tom ran away from such a tongue."

There was not much connection of ideas in Mrs. Temple's conversation, but she shook with laughter as she said: "I wonder when she'll call me in to speak to me about my Simon. I didn't tell you, did I, he was cotched at last in the very act? Yes, he was, then, and took off for a week. Ha, ha! that's good, ain't it? See there, Mrs. Thorn; there's your Thomas slinkin' in again. What a man he is, and only eleven years too!"

But Mrs. Thorn no longer saw the joke. Mrs. Harvey's words were still sounding in her ears.

Flouncing out of the house, which was next to the gin-palace, even now lit up with glaring lights, she suddenly darted at the astonished Thomas, who was looking stealthily round to see if by any chance his fond parents could see. He had just earned fourpence, and didn't see why he shouldn't have the benefit as well as they. He had been laughed at the last time he did it, and it was distinctly fun. But he never expected this treatment. The four pennies were tightly pressed in his hand, and one of the swinging doors was open, when Mrs. Thorn seized him from behind. Thomas jumped as if he had been shot.

"What d'ye want?" he cried, struggling.

"What do *you* want?" cried his mother, holding him tightly by the collar of his ragged coat. "Where's your money?"

"Nivver you mind," shouted the little rascal, still struggling like a little eel. He was too quick for her; he foresaw the doom of his precious pennies. Like a shot he had wriggled out of his coat, and Mrs. Thorn was left standing with the coat in her hand. The boy was gone.

"Never let me see you here again," she cried in her rage. And tucking the coat under her arm, she went inside to drown her newly-awakened conscience,

which was making itself unpleasantly felt. As long as she was inside she knew that Thomas wasn't, and she persuaded herself that she was doing right by the boy by staying a little later than usual. It never occurred to her mind that he had not far to go to find another public-house, and that at that very moment, in his ragged shirt-sleeves, he was spending his newly-earned pennies. Poor, little Thomas! What else is expected of you with such parents?

Mrs. Harvey suffered deeply that night. She was bitterly disappointed in Tom, though she told herself again and again that Mrs. Thorn's word was not to be relied on. Yet everything pointed to the truth of her words. How could he drink with no money? How could he get money but by not paying for his coat? This was a good enough reason for Binks to turn him off. Then she had forgotten herself with Mrs. Thorn. She had no business to speak out her mind so plainly; she had lost herself in her strong feeling about the child drunkard, and she could not but feel she would do it again, if the occasion offered. The idea of treating the boy's first offence as a joke was so revolting to her mind, she shuddered at the thought of it.

"Come, Billy, let mother sing to you," she said to

the child as he tossed restlessly about ; and to the old refrain of " Home, Sweet Home," the little boy dropped off to sleep.

When Mrs. Harvey met her neighbour, Mrs. Thorn, next day, she apologized for speaking so quick to her—for letting her tongue run away with her, so to speak.

" Bless you," answered Mrs. Thorn, with a somewhat sickly smile, " I *knew* you didn't mean what you said."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE FIRE IN BIFFEN ROAD.

**M**EANWHILE Tom was facing his temptations with a heart of steel. Wet and miserable as he was, he would not let himself be tempted to drink. More than once his courage failed him. "Who cares? what does it matter?" he cried desperately to himself. His hand was more than once on the handle of a gin-palace door, when some one the worse for drink would stumble out; and disgusted, Tom tramped on again.

"No, I haven't touched it for six months; I will not touch it now," he kept crying to himself, as the temptation grew fiercer and fiercer, and his will seemed almost paralyzed for want of food. He got small jobs from time to time, but no definite work; and so the days passed wearily away. Now he made up his mind to go back to Mrs. Harvey and Billy; now he

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resolved to return to his grandfather at Marlowe, and ask his forgiveness. But the days passed on, and found him still tramping the streets of London, growing a little thinner and a little more ragged each day, but resisting his temptation by an almost superhuman effort.

One night he had crept into a shed at the far end of the Biffen Road, where he was rather fond of sleeping. No one seemed to discover him there, and a great wagon shielded his cowering form from the policeman's eye. Worn out with his day's exertions, he was fast asleep, and the night was far advanced, when he was awoke by a cry of "Fire! fire!"

Aroused in a moment, he sprang up and was standing in the street in less than a minute.

"Where is it?" he cried, as a policeman hurried by him.

"Binks's," was his quick reply.

"Binks's clothing establishment!" cried Tom, in an agonized voice—"Binks, the man who has wronged me unjustly."

Yes, it was that very man—an enemy. Now for all a manhood's strength to forgive as you would hope to be forgiven; now to show that love that can lay down itself for a friend; nay, more than this—for an enemy!

For one moment only Tom hesitated ; then like lightning he darted down the street, passing the policeman, passing the few who had already been awakened like himself by the cry of " Fire ! "

Binks's establishment was a great five-story building, occupied at night by Binks and a boy, both of whom slept on the fifth story. Already smoke was issuing from the lower windows, but as yet no flames had burst forth. There were no signs of life in the top story ; the blinds were down, and all was still. The chances were that Binks was in one of his heavy, drunken sleeps, and the chances further were that he would be suffocated without ever awakening.

A crowd was quickly gathering.

" Fire ! fire ! " rose from every side, as the news spread, and the smoke rolled out more thickly from the lower windows.

" Is Binks there for certain ? " asked Tom excitedly of one of the crowd.

" For certain," was the answer. " Back room, fifth story."

" How soon can the fire-escape arrive ? " he asked quickly.

" Not for a few minutes yet," was the answer ; " the nearest station is a quarter of a mile off."

"Then we must break in," said Tom, almost under his breath. "Here," he added, in a loud voice, the determination of which commanded obedience ; "break open the door !"

Several men obeyed at once. In almost any crowd one determined man can lead the others like sheep.

But the door was firmly barred from the inside.

"Smash the window !" commanded Tom ; "here, this one, through which no smoke is coming."

"What are you going to do ?" asked a dozen voices, as Tom, with a look of startling determination, made for the window.

"To wake Binks," said Tom shortly. "Here, you fellows, give me a heave up for that window."

Like sheep they obeyed, wondering.

Why risk your life, when the fire-escape would soon be here? Binks was no favourite ; he was a hard task-master. Let him take his chance of life or death. He *was* a hard task-master, and who had cause to know it better than Tom ?

But Tom had disappeared, and as they fell to discussing the situation, he was fighting his way through blinding smoke, which might at any moment shoot into flames.

"Binks ! Binks !" he shouted, whenever he could

find breath, as he made his way up the steep stairs, one idea only in his head—to save Binks, the man who had wronged him.

But no answer came through the now blinding smoke. He knew they could never fight their way down again ; nothing but the fire-escape could save them once he had gained the fifth story. He had only reached the third, and already the dense smoke had given way to flames, which, with the heat, it seemed to him, of a blast furnace, were shooting in great jets out of the windows, and gaining ground on him even as he ran.

“Binks ! Binks !” he cried.

Suddenly he heard a voice ; it was not that of Binks, but of the boy, who had awoke with the noise of the fire and the shouts from below, and was now screaming with terror from his room at the top.

“Stay where you are, boy !” shouted Tom ; “you are all right ; I am coming.”

Still the boy shrieked on in his terror, and started to come down the stairs, mad with his fright.

Tom met him ; the smoke hid him from view, but as the terrified screams came nearer, he put out his arms, and seizing the boy, he dragged him up to the fourth story again.

"Let me go! let me go!" screamed the terrified boy.

"Where is your master?" said Tom, clutching him firmly, and panting for breath with his exertions and difficulty in breathing.

"There! there!" cried the boy, still struggling, and pointing to a back room on the fifth story.

Tom dragged him to the window.

The fire-escape was just arriving. If Tom waited till the boy was safe, he must be too late for Binks.

"Stay where you are!" he thundered to the boy, pushing him to the open window. "The fireman will fetch you; do you hear? If you run back into the room, you are dead."

Then putting his head out of the window, he beckoned wildly. The flames leapt up and burned his face and his hair.

A deafening shout rose from below, but Tom had gone. Darting back into the room, he fought his way to the last flight of stairs. The flames were gaining on him now, they were licking his feet as he ran on, on. Binks must be saved. And what was Tom's life to him?

At last he reached the door. There was Binks sound asleep, almost like one dead.

Tom seized the jug and dashed the cold water over his face; then catching firm hold of him by the shoulders, he dragged him toward the door, across the passage, and over to the window. The flames had reached the roof now; a few more minutes and both must perish.

Half unconscious, through heat and suffocation, Tom shouted through the window. The fireman was there below, the shoot was up and ready. With one desperate effort, Tom half lifted Binks up and let him fall down the shoot. The flames had fairly caught him, but he felt no pain—only a great helplessness seized him, his mind clouded over, a confused babel sounded from below, the bellowing of the flames roared above, he felt himself going, going, going. Was this the end? Rapid, half-formed thoughts darted through his dreamy mind. Billy—he should like to see Billy again—grandfather—Marlowe—Mrs. Harvey—all going, going. And then no more.

He saw nothing of the faces round him, as he was taken from the shoot, into which he had fallen, though they crowded round him with breathless curiosity; he heard none of the remarks volunteered from all sides, or the unreserved admiration of his conduct that was the chief topic amid the enormous crowd that had

gathered. He recognized none of the faces from Paradise Street; he lay unconscious, unthinking, dead to all around him, as they bore him away to the hospital, together with the man he had saved. The boy had escaped unhurt.

There, burnt almost beyond recognition, he lay in the full ward of the Charing Cross Hospital. Hours of deep unconsciousness followed his admission, and saved him from the agony that must follow. When first he came to himself and opened his eyes on the strange ward, he was too confused and tired to care where he had got to. He could remember nothing; his mind seemed a great blank, from which the whole past was blotted out. His head and face were bandaged up, his eyes burned as he closed them wearily, and an intensity of pain was attacking his limbs. His half-conscious mind wandered over his school-days, the holidays spent at Marlowe, and his grandfather's dinner-table. A burning thirst seized him. "Another glass of port!" he cried, pushing his hand forward with an imaginary empty glass. Then all grew quiet again as he fell into unconsciousness.

It was not till very late in the evening that he began to realize where he was and what had happened. The lights were low in the long ward; all was quiet,

except for some persistent groaning from a bed at one end. A nurse sat by the fire, not very far from Tom. She looked up as he spoke, and came to his bed-side. He was in terrific pain, but hardly a groan escaped him.

"Can you tell me," he whispered, "if a man Binks is here? I tried to save him from the fire, but I can't remember what happened."

The nurse went over to the table in the middle of the ward; she looked at her list of night cases. Her eye ran over the entry: "Samuel Binks, wholesale clothier, address, 49 Biffen Road, burnt." She returned to Tom's bed.

"Yes," she said, "there is a man Binks in the ward."

"Thank Heaven," muttered Tom in his pain; "thank you."

Then he closed his eyes and clenched his teeth, and tried to endure the terrific pain that seemed to grow fiercer and fiercer, till he felt he must scream aloud in his agony.

And so hour after hour of the long night passed slowly away, and the first streaks of light still found him wrestling with his agony, though not a groan or a cry escaped his dried lips.

## CHAPTER VI.

### WHO DID IT?

THERE was little enough sleep in Paradise Street that night. With the first cries of "Fire," the inhabitants, always ready for a little excitement, turned out. But when the cry ran down the street, "It's Binks's establishment," dismay took the place of fluttering expectation. For it meant ruin to many a one in Paradise Street.

An impatient stampede took place—men, women, and children ran up and down shouting, crying, laughing, screaming.

The flames were plainly visible from Mrs. Harvey's window. She fastened up a thick shawl, frightened lest Billy should awake and see them. Then she went downstairs and watched the flames and smoke from the street door.

"No fear of their spreading in this direction, I

suppose," she said anxiously, as one of the neighbours hurried by.

"No, missus, you're all right; the wind's in the wrong direction."

She gave a sigh of relief, but something gnawed at her heart-strings. Would Binks continue the work, or—or— She dared not contemplate the awful possibility of being thrown out of work. And the winter was just beginning too.

Still the footsteps hurried by, still the flames leapt higher. How did it catch? Who was in the house? Had the engine arrived? Mrs. Harvey felt very much inclined to run to the corner and just hear for herself.

But at that moment Billy moaned in his sleep, and fearful lest he should wake and cry, she determined to stay where she was, and just learn such details as she might standing there.

"Binks is asleep in the house." "The fire-escape has not yet arrived."

Such short pieces of information reached her.

"I wonder where Tom is to-night," she thought to herself. She little dreamt that at that very moment he was in the burning house; and had it not been for Billy, she would have seen him carried off to the

hospital, and known at any rate that he was now in good hands.

But cries from Billy called her upstairs, and she only learnt the story—that is, the story as related by Paradise Street—in the morning.

It was yet early when Mrs. Thorn, with the baby in her arms, entered Mrs. Harvey's house. She was sobbing hysterically as she stumbled up the stairs, and Mrs. Harvey went to the door to see what was the matter.

"You've 'eard the news?" cried Mrs. Thorn, plumping herself down on the bed and burying her face in the baby's shawl.

"What news?" cried Mrs. Harvey in consternation.

"Why, that they say Bill's done it; and oh, whatever *shall* I do?"

"Bill's done it?" cried Mrs. Harvey, and relieved her of the baby. "Why, done what?"

"Set Binks's on fire," sobbed Mrs. Thorn, with her apron over her head; "and he can't be found nowhere. The perlice have been hunting up and down; they've been all over the 'ouse, and they sez they'll have 'im, never fear; and Mrs. Temple sez they'll hang 'im. And oh, whatever shall I do? Bill has been a good 'usband to me, though last night I told 'im he was

the worst 'usband in all Paradise Street. But he went off and hasn't been back all night; and oh, what a night I've 'ad, to be sure!"

Again she retired into her apron.

It was a cold, damp morning, and Mrs. Harvey was shivering with cold and excitement. She set the baby down by Billy, lit a fire, and put the kettle on.

"A cup o' tea'll do you good," she said pityingly, for the evident distress of Mrs. Thorn touched her truly. "Tell me, What time did he go out? and why *should* he have set fire to Binks's when he worked for him?"

"That's just it," almost roared poor Mrs. Thorn in her distress. "Binks turned him off only yesterday. I should have come in to tell you, but I was that upset; and Bill sez to me, 'Come, Mima, here's my last money; we best go and have a last drink together.' He was furious angry was Bill, and he drank till I didn't know what to make of him. He let out against Binks too, and said he'd do for him somehows. I got him down home, and then he said he wouldn't come in, and he hit me over the head there and went, and I shouted after him he was a—a— Oh! whatever shall I do? He was a good 'usband to me was Bill, and that's the last I have seen of him."

"You didn't follow him? You don't know when he was last seen?" asked Mrs. Harvey.

"No, no," sobbed Mrs. Thorn, rocking herself backwards and forwards; "and I durstn't go outside again; they are all talking about me up and down the street. Oh, it's cruel, it is."

At that moment a low rapping was heard at the door, and a voice called up for Mrs. Thorn.

Mrs. Harvey went down to find two policemen below.

"Are you Mrs. Thorn?" they asked hurriedly.

"No," answered Mrs. Harvey; "she is upstairs."

"She must come at once; we have found a body under the ruins, and she must come to identify it."

Mrs. Harvey turned sick as she went upstairs with this grievous message. It had a disastrous effect on poor Mrs. Thorn, though it was broken to her with pitying sympathy.

Her sorrow and anger seemed beyond tears now. With dry and flaming eyes, she declared she would not go with them. Mrs. Harvey might lock the door; she was not going to walk down the street with those two policemen.

In vain Mrs. Harvey argued and pleaded. She was firm.

At last an impatient voice called up,—

“If Mrs. Thorn does not choose to come, we shall come and fetch her; we cannot waste our time like this.”

Mrs. Thorn trembled, and Billy cried aloud at the rough voices.

“Go,” cried Mrs. Harvey quickly; “for Billy’s sake, go. I will keep the baby.”

“Then you come too,” whispered Mrs. Thorn pitifully.

“I can’t leave Billy,” said Mrs. Harvey.

“Here! give him a drop of this,” whispered Mrs. Thorn, drawing a small bottle out of her pocket; “I use it for my children; it won’t hurt.”

“Drug him!” cried Mrs. Harvey in consternation, her mother-heart revolting at the horrible idea. “*No, never.*”

Policemen’s steps ascending the stairs brought things to a crisis. Trembling in every limb, Mrs. Thorn left the room.

“Come, missus; don’t keep us all night. You’ve just got to come and identify your husband; there’s not much doubt as we’ve found him. Seems he was a quick-tempered man, and been turned off work that afternoon; seen by B123 late last night near Binks’s, and never seen again.”

They tramped down the street quickly. Mrs. Thorn heard every word as in a far-away dream. Bill was dead—burnt beneath the ruins of Binks's establishment. What had he done, and why had he done it? He had left her and seven children to fight on without a penny in the world. Well, they said he would have been hanged if not.

There was not much difficulty in recognizing Bill's body, burnt though it was—several neighbours had already identified it; and with the last testimony of his wife, the matter was settled, and the wretched woman was allowed to go.

Instinctively she turned her feet towards Mrs. Harvey's. Most of Paradise Street were at their doors. They maintained a discreet silence as she passed down, looking neither to right nor to left, and no sooner had she passed than their tongues were unloosed, and the one topic alone was discussed. Details, true and untrue, were added to the story, already thrilling enough in all its ghastliness. How Mrs. Thorn had watched the fire was a much-disputed point. Some said she knew he was there, some said he was at home; again, that it wasn't Bill at all who did it, but Mrs. Harvey's lodger, Tom. He had been discharged from Binks's, and he had been seen that night. True,

he had saved Binks, but that might be to try and prove his innocence. So all day their suspicions rested on Tom rather than Bill, till one spoke up. She was a somewhat quiet woman, Mrs. Black, who lived at No. 5.

"If ye had bin close to that lad Tom, as I was last night, and seen his face, ye could not say that he had done it," she said. "I cannot get that lad's look out o' my head, try as I will. I'd give something to know if he's alive or dead."

So the opinion that Bill had done it gained in favour, together with the opinion that he must be buried by the parish, for he was in no insurance or club, and it was well known that he had never saved.

The necessary business transacted, Mrs. Thorn returned to Mrs. Harvey's. Somehow in her trouble she turned to her with the confidence of a child; it was no longer with the feeling of pride that she should have been honoured with her friendship. Not another soul in the street would have treated her as Mrs. Harvey did. She asked no questions; she treated her more as she treated her own tired little child. But the wretched woman felt her unspoken sympathy, and the mere rest of being in Mrs. Harvey's presence helped her. The children were allowed to come in

and out as they liked, and from time to time they brought back news of how things in the street were going on.

Mrs. Harvey was running up a bit of mourning for Mrs. Thorn; she insisted on crape, for which her aunt, who had hurried to Paradise Street on hearing the news, had offered to pay. She had likewise taken two of the children back with her, which made two mouths less to feed. And so the weary day wore on.

It was not till quite late that Mrs. Harvey heard the news about Tom. It was from little Thomas Thorn. It was about four o'clock when he came running up to say that the policeman wanted to speak to his mother again. The seriousness of the situation had not dawned on Thomas; he knew the facts of his father's sudden death, as related by the neighbours, and rather enjoyed the notoriety into which the family had suddenly sprung. He found himself an object of interest in Paradise Street, instead of being one of the many commonplace children in the row. It was with an air of importance then that he went across to Mrs. Harvey's, leaving the policeman outside the house, with every eye in the street upon him.

His mother having gone downstairs to attend to business, young Thomas sat down by Billy. Billy

was greatly excited about the fire, and was questioning Thomas eagerly about the details.

"Is it jest a little heap of ashes?" he asked, fixing his unnaturally large eyes on Thomas's plain little face.

"No, there's bits of the wall standing," said Thomas, "jest here and there where the water was a-playing on it. Wasn't it jest a blaze! I know I wouldn't ha' gone into the smoke as Tom did."

Mrs. Harvey looked up quickly.

"Tom! what Tom?" she asked, as the familiar name fell upon her ear.

"Why, your lodger Tom, o' course," said Thomas, as a matter that hardly needed explanation.

"But have you seen him?" asked Mrs. Harvey.

"O' course," said Thomas calmly; "he were at the fire last night."

"At the fire, Thomas? Our Tom at the fire?"

"Some sez as how he set it alight," continued Thomas, "and some sez he went in after Binks jest to put folks off the scent; but others sez father set it alight, cos he'd had a row with Binks and had been drinking hard."

Mrs. Harvey breathed quickly.

So Tom was there, near to Paradise Street, only

last night; and where was he now? what was he doing there?

"What more do you know, Thomas?"

"I only knows he went in at the winder—couldn't get in through the door; and he cries, 'Binks'll be burnt if the 'scape don't arrive;' and he plunges in at the winder; and by the time the 'scape came Tom was at the fifth story winder, with Binks a-draggin' behind him. They all cheers him below and sez, 'Well done, young Tom!' Then they both come down the 'scape somehows, and was carried off to the 'orspital."

Mrs. Harvey looked white, and Billy began to cry.

"Then Tom is burnt, and Billy won't see 'im no more," he wailed.

"They sez he were worse burnt than Binks," continued Thomas; "and they couldn't hardly recognize 'im when they got 'im down."

"But are you *certain* it was Tom?" asked Mrs. Harvey again. A boy's testimony was hardly to be relied on.

"Go and ask any one yer like," he said; "I thought you'd heard about 'im long ago."

"Take care of Billy, Thomas, a few minutes," said Mrs. Harvey; "I must go and make some further inquiries."

And slipping her shawl round her, she went out into the street. She felt bewildered and confused by this sudden, strange tale. Tom saving Binks from being burnt? Even Mrs. Harvey's idea of self-sacrifice could hardly realize what her lodger Tom had done. The idea that he had set fire to Binks's never crossed her mind again. It could not be credited for a moment. In the street she met Mrs. Temple, who instantly began about the proceedings of the former night. She was full of the tragic death of Bill Thorn, but Tom's part in the proceedings seemed to interest her little. Yes, he was there. Oh, there was no doubt that it *was* Tom, the young man that lodged in Paradise Street. She had seen him herself. She didn't know where they took him to. Terribly burnt she heard say he was, and Binks too—terribly burnt.

Mrs. Harvey passed on. The news was true then, too true; she must learn where he was. It would probably be Charing Cross Hospital; but she must learn for certain, and then she must go and see him. He would be wanting to see a familiar face, wherever he was. Perhaps he was dead, poor Tom; perhaps beyond the reach of his awful temptations. Well, it was not an ignoble death to die, if it were really true.

Mrs. Thorn and the policeman were coming out of the house, and Mrs. Harvey stopped them. Yes, the whole story was confirmed, and Tom was lying at the Charing Cross Hospital. Binks was there too, but so slightly burned that he might be dismissed in a few days.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" said Mrs. Harvey, turning to Mrs. Thorn.

"I never thought of it," half sobbed Mrs. Thorn. She had been so full of her own affairs, that it had never occurred to her to tell Mrs. Harvey of Tom.

It was too late to go so far that night; so Mrs. Harvey had reluctantly to go back, only to lie awake during the long, dark hours wondering if Tom were yet alive, and what had prompted him to do the action of self-sacrifice that had nearly, if not quite, cost him his life.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MRS. THORN'S REPENTANCE.

**B**UT the next day passed, and the next, and still Mrs. Harvey could not run round to see after Tom; and perhaps it was as well, for it would have pained her terribly to see poor Tom suffering the agony which, day and night, he endured—endured like a Spartan, though it brought the tears to his eyes, and he could have screamed aloud any moment. True, Mrs. Harvey lived in an atmosphere of pain; the sufferings of her child left their traces on her, for she had never managed to harden her heart to his groans and cries, and, wrung with pity for him, she suffered all his pain in her tender heart.

There was much to be done for Mrs. Thorn those next few days; the poor woman was incapable of doing anything for herself, save to sit and bemoan her fate. Never a penny had been saved to fall back upon

now, and had it not been for the kindness of neighbours and relations, she and her family must have fared badly. The proprietor of the Jolly Dragoons fed Thomas and his next brother, John. Their father had been a good customer, he said, and their mother too, for that matter. Mrs. Thorn was thankful to him—thankful, too, when he himself gave her a drink to soothe off the edge of her trouble, poor soul. She came back and told Mrs. Harvey about it, not wholly unprepared for her opinion on the subject.

"You're a fool, Mrs. Thorn," she said plainly. "If you want to go to the workhouse, go straight, before you drink away your remaining senses and the children's too. If you want to keep out, then leave your drink, and work to keep your home together and a roof over your children's heads."

"You don't know what trouble is, or you would not speak like that," moaned Mrs. Thorn.

"Perhaps not," answered Mrs. Harvey. "And yet—"

"How did *your* husband die?" asked Mrs. Thorn suddenly, thinking of a topic that might interest her in her affliction. Mrs. Harvey was startled. Didn't they all know *that* in Paradise Street by this time? How could they know? She had forgotten for the moment. She did not answer.

"P'raps he is not dead at all," said Mrs. Thorn, in a disappointed voice, though with a touch of curiosity in it all the same.

"I will tell you about it some day," said Mrs. Harvey, when she had pulled herself together, "but not now."

"And why not now?" said Mrs. Thorn, who had no delicate feelings with regard to other people's business.

"Perhaps you would not like my reason," said Mrs. Harvey.

"What is it?" said Mrs. Thorn.

"Why, this," answered Mrs. Harvey—"that as long as you go drinking and gossiping in that gin-palace, I can never tell you anything that I mind being handed down the street, and being laughed at as the story grows far away from the truth. There, Mrs. Thorn; I have told you, and I mean what I say. It isn't pleasant to have one's affairs passed about from one to another—a little bit added here, and another bit dropped off there."

"Well, your affairs have been well discussed," blurted out Mrs. Thorn angrily; "and p'raps, if we'd known the truth, they wouldn't have been so much talked over. What do you say to that?"

Mrs. Harvey did not care to enter into a controversy on this subject; and Mrs. Thorn, seeing she would get no further information, rose to go.

"Don't take it unkindly, Mrs. Thorn," said her neighbour. "Believe me, I am honestly grieved for your trouble, and I would do anything in my power for you; but while you are drinking as you are I am powerless. I can't even ask you to come and sit by Billy while I go over to the hospital to see after Tom. Give it up, woman, give it up. Go and get work. Go at once, this very day, and you may yet be what a woman *should* be."

"Mrs. Harvey, you're what a woman should be, if ever there was one," said Mrs. Thorn suddenly and unexpectedly; and with these words she left, apparently without a desire to imitate such an example. Nevertheless, she did not go straight to the gin-palace, as she had intended; she went home. She unlocked the door. The room looked cheerless and desolate enough; it was almost bereft of furniture—just a table stood in the middle of the room, and a few rickety chairs round it. On it was a strange mixture of dirty plates, apple peel, a hair brush, a saucepan, and some bits of crape.

She thought of Mrs. Harvey's spotless room,

which invariably gave her a sense of comfort and homeliness. Why was hers all so different? There was no comfort and homeliness here. She felt too miserable even to cry. There she sat in a broken rocking-chair, staring blankly at the dirty walls of her house, from which the paper was hanging in places, torn by the children. Her baby was lying on two chairs in a corner with a shawl thrown over it.

Her mind moved very slowly. It was revolving round the tragic end of Bill. He was a sober enough man when she married him, and they had a nice little home away in Bayswater, where he worked as a shop assistant in a clothier's establishment. There the first two children had been born, Thomas and John, two fine little boys. Then—somehow she remembered it all very vividly to-day—they had got into debt; they paid a high rent for their rooms. Then Bill had had an illness—congestion of the lungs—in the winter, and the doctor's bill had been hard to pay. They had moved into smaller rooms too, and the children were not well there. Bill was very weak after his illness, and took stimulants to keep himself up. That was the beginning. Then he lost his place. That was the beginning of the end. And now the end had come.

It was not at all an uncommon story of married

life. It was one sad story of fall, fall, fall, and degradation. There was nothing beautiful in it. There was little happiness after that; there was much that was miserable. The Christ that had lived on earth seemed to have lived in vain, as far as they were concerned.

Mrs. Thorn was still dreamily thinking over the days that were gone, when Mrs. Temple entered.

"Come with me and have a drop. I'll treat you, poor soul," she said compassionately, preparing to sit down on the sleeping baby with great emphasis. She was a large woman, and Mrs. Thorn sprang up and was just in time to save the skinny legs of her offspring from being crushed by Mrs. Temple's sixteen-stone weight.

To that lady's intense astonishment, instead of accepting joyfully, as usual, her kind invitation, Mrs. Thorn cried angrily,—

"Go, go to your infernal gin-palace, but do not ask *me* to come again."

A deep flush spread over her face as she spoke; it was not done without effort.

"Hoity-toity!" exclaimed Mrs. Temple, as soon as she had regained her equilibrium. "Are you ill, or off your head?"

"I am neither," cried Mrs. Thorn angrily. "Go, and leave me alone. Go at once, or I shall come."

Mrs. Temple sat petrified. Surely the woman *had* "gone off her head," for all she might say. She was not accustomed to being spoken to like this. It was most insulting.

"Have you turned saint, then?" asked Mrs. Temple, in anything but a pleasant tone.

Mrs. Thorn rose. She was about to give up her good resolve. This was more than she could stand—this mocking tone, this deriding imputation. Mrs. Temple would go and spread the news down the street, and she would be stared at more than ever. With this thought she covered her good resolve with a lie.

"No, Mrs. Temple. I'm no saint; but the truth is, I don't feel exactly well," she said, with a forced laugh—"a bit upset over Bill and the fire, and I won't come out to-night, thank you."

Mrs. Temple's mind was too muddled to see through this falsehood.

"I'll bring you a drop here," she said roughly.

Mrs. Thorn jumped at this proposal.

"Well, that would be comforting," she said joyfully; and Mrs. Temple took her departure.

But she was not destined to be left in peace long. Before Mrs. Temple returned (and here let me tell you Mrs. Temple did *not* return that day), Mrs. Wicks had come in for a chat, and so moved was she by Mrs. Thorn's dejected appearance that she also suggested treating her to a drop at the Jolly Dragoons.

Would the tempter never leave that poor, irresolute soul?

Mrs. Thorn was growing less decided every moment. The vision of her home as it was once, compared with what it was now, was growing dimmer and yet more dim; the longing for a glass of gin was growing stronger and yet more strong. In the heat of her first resolution she had refused; now her will was weak. The struggle seemed too hard.

"Come along," said Mrs. Wicks; "it'll do you good. Of course you are a bit upset, but it isn't good to crave for what you can't get. And Bill hadn't much saved, they tell me."

For an instant Mrs. Thorn stood her ground.

"I'll not come to-day, thank you, Mrs. Wicks. I'm not just the thing—a little upset, as you say."

"Oh, that's just sitting at home and moping. A drop'll do you more good, and to get away from the

children. I have just shook Jack till my breath was gone, and locked him up, he were that maddening this afternoon; and I daresay your children is the same."

Mrs. Thorn did not confess that this was her first visit to her home for some hours, and that she had only the baby at home.

"All the same, I think I'll just stop where I am, thanking you, Mrs. Wicks," she said.

"Well, of course, if you refuse things when they're offered, you won't expect to have them offered agen," said Mrs. Wicks testily, rising to go.

Mrs. Thorn was done for. She was throwing away every chance of ever being treated again in Paradise Street. She was a fool, she told herself—a fool.

"You're right, Mrs. Wicks. I daresay a drop *will* do me good, now I am feeling so very queer-like and upset."

And so saying, she took the baby in her arms and left the house with Mrs. Wicks.

Half down the street she looked up at the windows of No. 26. She hoped Mrs. Harvey would not see her. Mrs. Harvey was too busy to spend her time looking out of her windows. But looking out, his

little white face pressed against the pane, was Billy, as usual looking long and patiently for Tom. She remembered Mrs. Harvey's words: "I can't even ask you to come and sit by Billy while you are drinking."

Not fit to watch the little cripple child — not fit, not fit! A choking sensation seized her, and she stopped.

"I'm not feeling well enough to go on," she gasped to Mrs. Wicks. "I'll go home, I think."

"Well, go home," answered Mrs. Wicks ungraciously, and they parted company.

Instead of returning to her empty house, she went back to Mrs. Harvey's. She felt to be alone again would be fatal. She durst not be by herself; she would give in to her temptation.

Mrs. Harvey greeted her as usual, but something unusual in Mrs. Thorn arrested her attention and made her look hard at her.

"Yes, I'm come back," said Mrs. Thorn. "There's nothing but tempters over there, and I can't hold out alone;" and then, overcome by her efforts, tears came to her relief—tears such as she had not shed since she was a young woman, and lived in Bayswater, when the first debts had arisen. The woman was coming

to herself, and Mrs. Harvey was silent. She did not know exactly what had happened, but she vaguely guessed that the conscience, long stilled, was awakening, and the idea of a better life was working in Mrs. Thorn's mind.

She grew calmer after a time. But Mrs. Harvey was at a loss what to say. At last she said, almost under her breath,—

“You will not do it in your own strength. There is One stronger than you are.”

Mrs. Thorn made no reply. Convulsive sobs shook her from time to time.

Billy could not bear to see her so unhappy. Taking his little crutches, he limped across to her, and looked up into her sorrow-laden face.

“Don't cry,” he said. “Tom's gone to get bloater skins for Billy, and you shall have one bit when he comes.”

Both women smiled. But Mrs. Thorn was beyond the comfort of a bloater skin even in the dim future. She kissed the little, white face looking up at her, and her hot tears fell on him.

“There, I'll go and trouble you no more. I'll lock my door, so no one can tempt me. You and Billy there are not made o' the same stuff as us in Paradise

Street. There's something here makes one ashamed of oneself. Good-night, Mrs. Harvey.—Good-night, Billy ; you ain't long for Paradise Street."

"Good-night, Mrs. Thorn," said Mrs. Harvey. "May Heaven deliver you from temptation, and," she whispered to herself, "be merciful to Billy."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN THE HOSPITAL.

TOM was lying with his eyes half closed one afternoon a few days after the fire. It was visiting day, but he expected no visitors, and he only took a languid interest in the motley crew that flocked into the ward at the appointed hour. He was still feeling very ill, and was almost glad he had not to exert himself to speak to any one. He was surprised to find he was the object of some attention in the ward; the patients pointed him out to their friends as a person of interest, he hardly knew why. That night of the fire was still so hazy, the idea of everything that happened so confused, that in vain he tried to remember clearly what had happened and exactly what part he had played in it.

Another thing puzzled him. Had Mrs. Harvey heard nothing of the fire? Amid that gossiping throng

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in Paradise Street had nobody told her that he had been seen? It was curious if she had not heard where he was and come to look for him. Perhaps she had been offended at his leaving her as he did, without a word of gratitude for all she had done for him; but she was not the sort of person, somehow, to be offended at that. What did she think? what was her reason for never coming? Perhaps Billy was worse—poor little Billy! Did he suffer such pain as Tom was enduring? Tom had not realized what physical pain was before; now he could sympathize with Billy, now he knew. He was dreamily turning over thoughts like these in his mind, when he heard a discussion going on at the bed next to his which arrested his attention.

An oldish man lay there with a bad leg, and a young man and woman, evidently his son and daughter, were sitting and talking to him, telling him of the fire in the Biffen Road.

“And you say they really think the young man set it afire?” asked the old man in a hoarse whisper.

“They say down in Paradise Street there ain’t no manner of doubt but what he did,” answered the young woman. “You see, there was every reason he should; he and Binks had had such a row about some

work, and he had been turned off sudden only the Monday before the fire. It was a spiteful thing to do, too," she added, taking a look round the ward.

"Wasn't there a candle burning by Binks's bed that got upset?" asked the old man, to whom various accounts had come.

"No, no," answered his son, "the fire burst out from the lower windows; it must have been done by some one from the outside; or they say now he got in before it was locked up—followed Binks in, and hid down below. You see, it was some one who knew the place well."

Tom had heard enough. Here was the explanation. He had been seen amid the fire; he had done it.

O Paradise Street, once more you have to be thanked for this! Tom's agony of mind was pitiful. He could not speak, he could not ask how the story arose, who founded this preposterous accusation. He just believed every word that he had heard. He had not the strength or the courage to ask for further explanation; he just turned over on his side, so that he should hear no more of this terrible story that was afloat. That was why Mrs. Harvey had not been to see him; doubtless she knew and believed the story, and she would have nothing more to say to

one who had acted in such a disgraceful way. Ah well, he had no friends now. His mind was revolving round this new state of things. Why, he asked himself pitifully, should we be made to suffer for doing what we know to be right? Why should our actions be misinterpreted, our best endeavours twisted? He was too ill to be really angry, but he felt sore, very sore, and the agony of his physical pain slowly gave way to a mental anguish which tormented him by night and day.

"He is not getting on as fast as I should like," he heard the doctor remark one day. "Something is troubling him."

He moved on to his other patients and finished his rounds, but by-and-by he came back and sat down by Tom.

"Come, my lad, you must get well as quick as you can."

Tom started up in bed. "I cannot, I cannot," he half sobbed. "I would sooner die; indeed, sir, I would sooner die."

"Oh, come," said the doctor cheerily; "you will get quite well again. *You* are in no way implicated in the origin of the fire; indeed, I have heard you behaved exceedingly well on that night."

"I tried to do right," said Tom in a low voice, "but I believe it is generally supposed that—that—"

A burst of tears stopped the end of the sentence, and Tom turned his head away.

"You are weak and ill," said the doctor, "and you are imagining things that have never happened."

"But every one is against me," murmured Tom; "they say I set the fire going because I had been turned off from Binks's some days before."

"Tell me the truth, boy," said the doctor kindly. "Is there any foundation at all for this story?"

Tom looked straight in the doctor's face, and his brown eyes were full of tears as he answered,—

"No, sir; on my word of honour, there is not a word of truth in it. I have no idea how the fire arose; I was sleeping under a shed some way off when I first heard the cry of fire."

"And what happened then?" asked the doctor. "How did you get mixed up in it at all?"

"I ran along to see where it was, and heard it was Binks's; and I heard them say Binks was asleep inside. The fire-escape had not arrived, and I thought Binks would get burnt, so I just tried to save him; and I believe he has been discharged now all right again."

"And Binks never came across to see you and thank you before he went out?" asked the doctor inquiringly.

"No, sir," answered Tom.

Gratitude he had never expected and never received.

"Scoundrel!" escaped the doctor's lips.

"He probably thinks with the others that I set it on fire," said Tom hopelessly. "Things will go hard with me at the police court. I had sooner die here in comfort."

"You must get well, boy. You have told me the truth, and I believe you; I think others will believe you too."

So saying, he went away, but the case dwelt in his mind all day. The superiority of the young man struck him; the high tone, the simplicity of his story, touched him. This Tom was made of finer material than most of the patients; he felt there was some story behind all he had heard. That open face and those honest brown eyes *could* not be lying to him; he knew the man who lied. Few Englishmen can look you straight in the face and lie to you.

Tom was comforted by his conversation with the doctor.

"Things can't get much worse than they have

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been," he said to himself; "and there is the chance that some day they may grow better."

And so it came to pass that the next visiting day found Tom somewhat brighter. With a return of physical strength had come the desire to live, and he was half sitting up in a red jacket, still looking very ill; but the utter hopelessness had gone from his face, and life was looking more possible again. He was taking some slight interest in the friends of the patients, when suddenly the sight of a familiar face made him change colour.

"Mrs. Harvey—missus!" he cried involuntarily, stretching out his thin arms. "At last you have come!"

Something in the extreme sadness of her face suddenly struck him.

"How's Billy?" he half whispered, fearing what the answer might be.

"He's been very bad," she answered, sitting down beside the bed, "but he's a little easier to-day."

Was it possible then *this* was the reason she had not come before? Somehow he had not thought of it before. He almost laughed at the possible idea.

"I *am* glad you've come," he said half shyly.

"I wish I could have come before," she answered

sadly ; " but, Tom—you *have* been bad," she added, looking at his thin, white face, still bandaged.

" Yes," he said, " but the mental pain has been the worst."

" What do you mean, Tom ?" said Mrs. Harvey, still looking at his troubled face.

" Don't you know, then ?" cried Tom in a hoarse whisper. " Haven't you heard the report ? Isn't *that* the reason of your staying away ? Oh, speak quickly."

" Report ! Reason ! I don't know what you are talking about," she said anxiously, beginning to fear lest *his* reason had forsaken him.

He lay back gasping. Only his lips moved. At last he whispered, " Thank Heaven. Then I am not guilty in *your* eyes at any rate."

" Explain yourself, Tom," said Mrs. Harvey quietly. " You are talking in riddles. The *only* reason I did not come before was that first Mrs. Thorn, poor soul, took up all my time, and then Billy grew worse, and it was quite impossible to leave him."

" Tell me about them all before I tell you," whispered Tom. " Tell me what they say about it in Paradise Street."

So Mrs. Harvey told him the whole story as she

knew it—all about Bill Thorn's discharge from Binks's, his revenge, and his subsequent death. Tom listened eagerly.

"And they say Bill Thorn did it; are they sure, are they quite, quite sure?" he half cried, raising himself in bed and fixing his eyes on Mrs. Harvey's face.

"Yes, there seems no manner of doubt," she answered. "The evidence is very strong against him—even his wife believes it; and it seems impossible to find any one else with a motive."

Tom lay back and shut his eyes, as if to shut out thoughts that would crowd into his mind.

"Has any one mentioned me?" he forced out.

"You, Tom?" Mrs. Harvey involuntarily pushed her chair back, as if recoiling from such a terrible thought. Then she put her hands over her eyes. Was it possible? The idea of the lie he had acted to her; the coat he had stolen, as she supposed; the idle story of his having been drinking—all these returned on her with one hot rush.

"Tom, Tom!" she almost cried, "you didn't do it. Tell me, oh, tell me you didn't do it!"

As he had looked at the doctor in answer to the same question, so now he looked at Mrs. Harvey, his brown eyes full of tears.

"No, Mrs. Harvey," he said, and the ring in his broken voice was true; "I did *not* do it."

For a moment there was silence. Around the hum of voices went on. Here was a wife rejoicing over the recovery of her husband, the bread winner for her five little children; here was another wife, a young woman with a baby in her arms, just watching her husband slowly dying, whispering to him her parting words, while the unconscious baby crowed and kicked, and the man could only press her hand with his feeble fingers. In the far corner lay a boy playing draughts with a boy friend of his; in the next bed lay the old man, his daughter sitting beside him in silence, looking round at the other patients curiously. There were tragedies going on around, but neither Tom nor Mrs. Harvey noticed anything; each was absorbed with thoughts too deep for words.

At last the bell rang for the wards to be cleared, and the nurse walked round to say a few words to those who had special leave to stay.

Mrs. Harvey rose with the others.

"Good-bye, Tom," she said; "I shall come again next visiting day. You must try to get well and not worry yourself. You are innocent, and justice will be done you."

"Good-night, Mrs. Harvey. You have done me good coming. I *should* like to see Billy, though. Couldn't you bring the little chap along with you next time?"

But Mrs. Harvey shook her head wearily, and Tom understood the words she could not speak.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER.

MRS. HARVEY returned to find Billy sitting up against the window. He knew she had gone to see Tom, and he half hoped she might bring him back again. Accordingly, when she entered the room, she was met by a dismal wail of despair, and Billy hid his curly head and refused to be comforted. It was some little time before he could be quieted, and then Mrs. Harvey told him that Tom was ill and in bed.

"Ill like me?" asked Billy, half sobbing still with his disappointment. "Has he got pains like me?"

"Yes, poor Tom has had dreadful pain, and his head and face are tied up with bandages still."

"What! is his face so burnt?" asked Mrs. Thorn, who had been staying with Billy while his mother was out.

"Yes, but his mental pain is worse," said Mrs. Harvey; "he is tormented with the idea that he is suspected of causing the fire. It seems Binks has spread the report that he only tried to save him to ward off suspicion. The man seems incapable of understanding the boy's self-sacrifice."

For a moment a fierce temptation seized Mrs. Thorn.

Appearances were against Tom; he had no one to speak for him. Why should Bill be dishonoured in his grave, his children pointed at with a finger of scorn? These thoughts went quickly through Mrs. Thorn's brain; her face hardened as she thought, and her old set expression returned. Drinking had drowned her better self, or thoughts like these would have been impossible.

But the idea was slowly penetrating Billy's sickly mind that Tom, his friend Tom, was accused of something wrong.

With childish indignation he burst forth,—

"Mother, Tom didn't do that; I *knows* he didn't. Will they hang 'im for it?"

With this last awful thought he began to cry again.

"No, no, Billy, Tom didn't do it; we know he didn't

do it, you and I, don't we? We will never believe what unkind people say."

"Then who did do it?" asked the child. "If we knew *that*, we would *know* Tom didn't do it."

There was silence in the room. Only the old clock ticked loudly. Mrs. Thorn could hear her own heart beating; it threatened to suffocate her.

"Who did it?" asked Billy.

She looked across at the child. His little, white, worn face was full of eager inquiry; his brown eyes were fixed on his mother as he repeated his question.

"Mother, who did it then?"

Mrs. Thorn could hesitate no longer.

"Bill Thorn did it," she said. Her voice sounded stony, her eyes were dry, her cheeks were white.

The child had saved her once; the child saved her again.

Mrs. Harvey looked up quickly. She looked the gratitude she could not speak, and Mrs. Thorn caught her eye. Rising, she mumbled something about the children, and made for the door.

"Won't you stop a little longer?" said Mrs. Harvey kindly.

"No," was the answer. It sounded ungracious, but it was spoken with a muffled sob.

Down the dark stairs, through the narrow door, across the dirty street, and into her own little room went Mrs. Thorn. It was cleaner and tidier than before; the hearth was swept, the windows cleaned. The children were at school. Mrs. Thorn staggered to the old rocking-chair, and there she sat and wept bitterly. It was her better self that cried out; the old self was dying, but dying hard. Mrs. Harvey had taught her, all unconsciously, that to be good was better than anything else in life; just to try to be good, and gentle, and kind, made earth a very heaven. She knew it, she had always known it, but now it was borne in upon her; the idea took hold of her, would not leave her. And with the natural instinct of prayer that comes to all in their misery, she sobbed for help from the unseen world.

At that moment Thomas entered with one of the younger children.

"Mother!" he cried, in a voice of suppressed excitement, "the landlord of the Jolly Dragoons says you haven't been to him for ten days an' more; if you ain't goin' no more, you better pay up what you owe—and that's a penny or two," he added with a knowing wink.

A disreputable little street arab looked Thomas as

he stood before his mother; his trousers were torn, moreover they had never been hemmed round the feet, for he had the top half of an old pair of his father's, and the small brother he held by the hand had the lower half tied up round his waist with a cord—they were hemmed at the bottom, and not at the top. Each had a piece of crape stitched round his arm, and black-and-white comforters round their necks. Thomas had a cap on, which he never thought of removing in the house; but George, the younger one, had lost his, and there was no money to replace it.

Mrs. Thorn looked at them as they stood before her; no mother could have felt proud of such a pair. She looked at them with new eyes now. Was this Thomas, her first baby, whom she had devoured with affection, and for whom she had stitched and sewed—this little street arab her curly-headed baby, the joy of her heart, the pride of her life? From Thomas she looked at George. George was born in Paradise Street, when their fall had come and they were treading the downward path recklessly, hopelessly. He had an evil little face, and looked obstinate and dogged as he stood before her, waiting to be beaten for losing his cap.

Thomas in his turn was taken up with looking at

his mother. She looked different somehow, and not as if she meant to fly at George and beat him mercilessly, as she did sometimes when he aggravated her. Her eyes were very red and swollen, but her face was very white. As she put her hand towards Thomas, George took the opportunity of slipping away; he felt instinctively the beating was imminent. If his mother was drunk, she would very likely beat Thomas instead, and this George could bear with composure.

Mrs. Thorn drew Thomas towards her.

"Tommy," she said, and there was a tenderness in her voice he never remembered to have heard before—"Tommy, do you know you were once my curly-headed baby, the pride of your mother's heart?" Her eyes filled with tears again. Thomas did not see the force of her speech; he supposed he *had* once been a baby. He had a vague and unhappy feeling that his mother must be going to die, or else she was going to beat him. He instinctively drew back. "Tommy," she said, drawing him closer to her, "father and I were good in those days, and we never drank, or swore, or got into debt; we kept a tidy home and had plenty of food."

Thomas's eyes opened wide. Plenty of food! He only wished there was something to eat on the table

at that very moment. He could eat—oh yes, he *could* eat.

“Wishes we had plenty to eat now,” he could not help saying, somewhat wistfully.

The reproach cut his mother to the heart. Whose fault was it that there was no food for the children? Hers—a thousand times, hers. She bowed to the storm, and it seemed as if the billows rolled over her.

“They sez we’ll have to go into the work-’ouse,” remarked Thomas; “and Mrs. Temple sez if you can’t pay up at the Jolly Dragoons, we’ll have to get off in the night.”

Mrs. Thorn started to her feet.

“No, no, Thomas; not that, not that,” she cried half hysterically. “We will be honest; we will pay our debts with the last penny.”

Thomas looked amazed. He had heard a great deal about being honest at school, but he had never seen very much practice of it outside school. The idea of the last penny going to pay debts raised up a vista of misery before him, and the idea of “plenty of food” was disappearing rapidly into space.

“Tommy, I’m not going to the Jolly Dragoons any more,” said his mother. “I’m going to give up the drink, and make a happier home for you.”

"Then they'll come and turn you out if you don't pay up," said Thomas wisely; "ye better not let 'im know that till the money's paid."

The problem of how to pay that debt faced Mrs. Thorn all through that night; it had been slowly mounting up, she knew, though she did not know to what amount. She had determined to get work to do at home, and had been making inquiries about it; but that would barely keep the home together, let alone paying out extra.

It is said that troubles never come singly. Have you ever noticed how true the converse of this is too—that joys never come singly either?

Now to all appearances—yes, even to his own mother—young Thomas had seemed nothing but a mere young rascal, a little gutter boy, dirty, untidy, uncared for; he was naughty, indeed very naughty, with his drinking habits, a decided taste for stealing, and a hazy idea of truth. No one was much surprised when he suddenly announced that he had left school. He had got through his standards with the unusual sharpness that some of these little street arabs possess; and the day the news was known, Thomas removed himself for ever.

He never told his mother, young ruffian; but every

day he took his departure with the other children, and disappeared down the street in the direction of the school. This had gone on for nearly a week, when one day he returned in the middle of the morning, his usually pale face aglow with eagerness.

His mother was scrubbing—yes, actually on her knees scrubbing in dirty Paradise Street. Door and window were closed, indeed the blind was drawn down for fear some passing neighbour might catch her in the act—not a very unholy act, after all, but it was not contained in the creed of Paradise Street, and therefore it was unpopular and unorthodox.

Young Thomas ran in with extremely muddy boots; the one boot-lace was streaming behind his boot, and it left a little muddy track, even after the large splotch of mud that each foot-mark left. If it hadn't been for what he had to say, I really think Mrs. Thorn would have given him a good shaking; but he had an important communication to make.

"I've got work, I've got work, mother!" he cried triumphantly, his eyes almost darting out of his head, his cheeks flaming, his grubby cap on the back of his head.

"You, Thomas, work?" cried his mother in amaze-

ment, wiping her forehead with the scrubbing cloth in her agitation. "What work, and how and where?"

"You'll nivver guess," he cried in a shrill voice. "Binks 'as given me some work."

Mrs. Thorn let the scrubbing cloth fall back into the cracked pudding basin, which contained her scrubbing water.

"Binks!" she almost screamed in her astonishment. "Are you telling me the truth, Thomas? You're still at school."

"Am I?" he cried. "No, no; I left more 'an a week ago, and I've been tryin' to get work, so as we could get along, seein' you 'aven't no man now to 'elp."

Young Thomas drew himself up as he said these words, leaving a sorry gap in his clothing.

"But *Binks*," said his mother—"how did he come to take you?"

"Ha, ha!" cried Thomas, "'twas Mrs. Harvey and Tom as worked that for me; they was in the secret, and I've got it—only, I've got to be made tidy." And Thomas looked despairingly at his rags.

Mrs. Thorn looked somewhat despairingly at them too; they looked beyond all hope, ragged and tattered and torn, and it was absolutely all he had got. His

hair was long and unbrushed, and his face looked as if a little soap would do wonders.

Suddenly a bright idea occurred to his mother.

"I'll cut your hair, Tommy," she said; "that'll make you look better."

Suiting the deed to the word, she emptied the dirty, soapy water out of the pudding basin on to the floor, clapped it down on Thomas's dishevelled head, and taking a small pair of scissors, began to clip round the edge. The effect was surprising, though the scissors were not particularly sharp; then a brush with great scarcity of bristles, but a brush all the same, was applied vigorously, a little water was sprinkled over to keep the parting, and Thomas rose from the operation feeling and looking decidedly smarter.

"I could spare a little soap from the floor for your face, Tommy," said Mrs. Thorn, eyeing his head with satisfaction. "But it's yer coat and trousers that don't look quite the thing."

Thomas twisted his head backwards to try to comprehend the back view; he knew the front was not perfect—there were no buttons on at all, one sleeve was almost out, and the trousers were those already described.

At that very moment Mrs. Harvey appeared at the door. She knew all about Thomas's news—indeed, good woman, it was owing to her that there was any news at all; and she had come over to witness Mrs. Thorn's pleasure, and to consult about Thomas's appearance. She almost laughed when she entered at the quaint sight before her. Thomas, stripped to the waist, was vigorously scrubbing his face with the help of the scrubbing brush and pudding basin, while his mother was handling his ragged garments with something akin to despair.

"I thought as much," said Mrs. Harvey. "I've brought over Tom's coat—the one he left to pay me with, and which I hadn't the heart to sell after he'd gone; it'll be too big, but you must cut off the ends of the sleeves and hem up the bottom. Then he hasn't a shirt of his own, he tells me, so I've brought over two of Billy's; they'll be too small, but maybe the two'll cut into one, just to give him a start; and the trousers I've been thinking over," she added with a smile. "I think Thomas'll have to go to bed for the afternoon, and we'll get them washed out and mended with the pieces out of Tom's coat. Now, what do you think, Mrs. Thorn?"

Mrs. Thorn didn't think at all—her poor muddled

mind was paralyzed ; she only looked stupidly at Mrs. Harvey and then at Thomas. But Thomas's quick mind was thinking very hard. This was the happiest day in his short life. He had slipped the coat over his bare body before his mother could speak ; the sleeves hung over his hands, and the coat nearly reached his knees at the back. Mrs. Harvey could not help laughing at the grotesque little figure before her. Thomas was laughing too.

Suddenly Mrs. Thorn found her tongue, and a dim realization of what Mrs. Harvey was doing came across her.

"You are giving too much," she stammered. "Thomas must not take the coat and those shirts ; we have taken too much from you already."

Mrs. Harvey smiled. This was the first trace of nice feeling that had come over Mrs. Thorn.

"The coat is Tom's gift," she said ; "*he* wished young Thomas to have it, and asked me to bring it over. The little shirts will never be wanted by Billy again."

Mrs. Thorn started at the sad ring in her voice.

"He's no worse is he ?" she asked anxiously.

"Not much worse to-day," said Mrs. Harvey sadly ; "but looking back I see the difference in him, and

he seldom is well enough to be dressed now. I made him six little shirts last year, but I know now he'll never want them again."

A choking sensation came over Mrs. Thorn at the bitterness of Mrs. Harvey's speech, and even into her slow-thinking mind came the thought of how easily she could have spared one; and yet this woman's one precious little life was being taken, and *her* seven little hardy lives were being left.

But there was no time to be lost. Mrs. Thorn looked the gratitude she could not speak. Thomas was put trouserless to bed, and the garments were consigned to a wash-tub that was borrowed over the way.

## CHAPTER X

### YOUNG TOM COMES FORWARD.

TOM'S convalescence was very slow. The long period of worry and starvation that preceded the fire was telling on him ; the long period of drinking before Mrs. Harvey found him was telling on him yet more. A man undermines his constitution by constant drinking, and in illness this tells quickly. It was so with Tom, and the doctor told him so plainly. Poor boy, he knew it but too well ; and he knew, too, the awful struggle he had had against it, the yearning, the craving that came over him now and again, that made him feel he would sell his very soul for a drink. The doctor had dragged out of him his story, even to his leaving his grandfather's house—yes, even to the very name of his old home. Tom had confided to him all about Mrs. Harvey and her finding him, about Billy, even a good deal about Paradise Street ;

and the kindly doctor seemed deeply interested in them all.

"And don't you think of going back to your grandfather when you leave this?" he asked one day.

Tom was sitting up in bed with a red-flannel jacket on, his face was white and drawn, his hands were almost like a woman's in their transparency.

"No, sir," he answered; "not till I have earned enough to rig myself out fit to walk up the drive to Marlowe Hall. My grandfather is proud; he would not receive me like this, and—"

Tom hesitated; something further was in his mind.

"And what?" asked the doctor.

"He might tempt me again with the drink. He has good wines on his table. I could not resist them before. I could not resist them now if the crave was on me," he added.

The doctor looked somewhat admiringly at this lad who knew his own weakness so well, and was determined to overcome it. He had seldom realized what a desperate fight it was, this fight with the drink. He seemed to realize it now, in the presence of this well-born boy who had fallen to such depths, when he might have had all the comforts and luxuries of life about him. But as he rose to go he smiled to

himself, for he had a little plan of his own. The first thing to be done was to get hold of Binks, and make him express gratitude to his saviour, Tom; the next was to inform his grandfather of the boy's condition.

Accordingly, one visiting day, Tom's surprise was intense to see Binks himself at the great door at which visitors entered the ward. Tom had only had Mrs. Harvey to see him on visiting days, and she only came occasionally, when she could leave poor Billy. True, once she had met young Thomas Thorn lurking about outside, and had taken him in to see Tom, more for the sake of keeping him out of mischief than for any other reason. Thomas had been deeply impressed with the scene around him, and had made so bold as to go and visit Tom all on his own account at the next visiting day. He had poured out his heart to Tom; had told him about his mother—how he wanted to get work, and help pay the rent, to keep them out of the workhouse more than anything else.

But neither Mrs. Harvey nor young Thomas had appeared on this particular afternoon, and only half an hour was left for the public to be admitted.

Binks looked very sheepish and shy, and had evi-

dently been hanging about the door for some time before Tom caught sight of him. Suddenly the doctor appeared—the doctor; for though there were many, there was only one as far as Tom was concerned. His kind face always reassured the boy when things looked dark, and a word from him seemed worth a whole bottle of medicine. Mental disease is a harder battle to fight than physical, and Tom was suffering as much, if not more, from the former as the latter. The doctor took hold of Binks by the arm, and kindly, but firmly, marched him into the ward. To avoid any suspicion, he first walked to the table in the middle, where one of the nurses was busy.

“See, this case is a complete cure,” he said, making Binks hold out his burnt arm. “Now, come along, Mr. Binks; here is another friend of yours.” So saying, he led him across to where Tom lay.

Never did two men look or feel more thoroughly uncomfortable than did these two when they were brought face to face. If it had not been for the doctor, Binks would certainly have fled precipitately, and never allowed himself to face Tom again. But the doctor had his hand lightly on the man’s shoulder.

"Mr. Binks here has a word or two to say to you, Tom," he said. "He has only now realized, it seems, that he is under a great debt of gratitude to you for saving his life, and he wishes to express that gratitude himself before another day has passed.—Isn't that right, Mr. Binks?"

Binks would not look at Tom, but the boy's face was bright with this news, and his eyes looked eagerly into the shifty face before him for a further acknowledgment.

But Binks was silent. It was an embarrassing interview.

"I don't want thanks," said Tom bitterly; "I should like to be friends—that's all."

He held out his thin, white hand. But Binks did not raise a finger. He looked stupidly before him, over Tom's head, to the blue-tinted wall beyond.

A sob was heard from the next bed; it was only a little child saying good-bye to its mother, for the visitors' hour had passed, and they were slowly leaving the long ward.

The doctor passed to the next bed and lifted the little child up.

"Mother'll soon come back," he said, wiping away

the little boy's tears ; "and see," he added, taking out his watch—"let us see if it isn't tea-time."

While he talked to the child, Binks and Tom remained in total silence. At last Tom spoke.

"I don't want to be thanked," he said again ; "I couldn't have done otherwise."

For a moment Binks turned his watery eyes toward Tom, but still he said nothing ; and as the bell sounded for the visitors to go, with a sense of relief he turned.

"Good-night, sir," he said to the doctor, and without another word he had disappeared.

Not another word was said on the subject ; but the following Sunday, the next visitors' day, a most unexpected thing occurred.

Young Thomas was sitting by Tom, recounting various incidents that had come under his notice in Paradise Street, retailing gossip and scandal that he had picked up outside the Jolly Dragoons, where he had been "treated" twice since his father's death, and making Tom laugh with some of his funny stories.

Suddenly in walked Binks, and like a flash of lightning young Thomas fled. It was hardly to be expected that he should stop and interview the man


to whom his father had done such revengeful injuries, and an idea seized him that probably Binks had followed him, Thomas, to the hospital, and meant to have his revenge. Accordingly young Thomas, with visions of reformatories, floggings, and imprisonment vaguely looming before him, ran, and ran, and ran down street after street and alley after alley, with a terror-stricken little face, vowing and swearing he would never go near Tom again, that he was a "deep un" to entice him there and then let Binks catch him. "But I was too quick for 'em this time," murmured the young rascal, as he ran on his headlong course.

Meanwhile Binks, with nothing further from his mind than chasing young Thomas Thorn, advanced slowly to Tom's bed, and held out his red hand.

"I was a brute the other day," he muttered, "and I've come to thank you."

Tom looked up in sheer astonishment. Binks spoke in a gruff voice, and his words sounded forced and ungracious; but he had spoken, and Tom had a shrewd idea of what these words must have cost him.

"That's all right," he said; "don't say another word; sit down and have a talk. How's the new building getting on?"



But Binks took no notice of his words. He was wound up to speak now ; he had rehearsed his speech for two days and two nights, and he would not fail again.

"I've come to thank you," he continued, saying the words much as if he were a boy at school again, repeating a half-learnt lesson. "You saved my life, and I'm glad of it, for I shouldn't like to ha' died that night."

He had taken Tom's thin hand, and he gave it a wring that made the lad wince with pain. But the words were said. Binks had done his duty, and he heaved a sigh that might well have come from the great hobnail boots on his feet. He was a coarse-looking man, well dressed, though in bad taste, with something forbidding-looking in his red and blotchy face.

He sat down beside Tom, and looked almost stealthily round the ward, for fear he should see a friend or foe ; for, indeed, Binks had more foes to reckon among his acquaintance than friends. But his restless eye found neither friend nor foe, and he became more settled.

Tom talked about various things, and neither man touched on the cause of the fire, though each mind

was full of it. Binks became more at his ease after a time, and it was almost with reluctance that he rose to go. He had still something more to say. He wanted to offer Tom work when he came out of hospital, but he felt it was impossible. Tom was much the bigger man of the two, though this was not the reason that kept Binks from speaking, because his small, grovelling mind had not recognized this fact. But as he rose to go, he blurted out something about hoping Tom would let him know when he came out, and he would be glad to show him any kindness that lay in his power. Tom seized the opportunity.

"Do you mean it, Binks?" he cried.

"Of course," said Binks. "You helped me, I help you; that's the game, isn't it?"

"Then help me now," cried Tom.

"How?" asked Binks in perplexity.

"Give work to young Thomas Thorn," said Tom slowly, never taking his eyes off Binks's face.

Quickly his expression changed.

"No," he said; "you're asking too much. I will help *you*; I will not help that rascal Thorn."

As he said the name, a look of hatred passed over his face.

Tom noticed it. Binks was nursing revenge still. It was no use to plead further.

"You said you would help me," murmured Tom.

"So I will help *you*," repeated Binks, frowning.

"I will not help any one else."

The idea that by helping young Thomas he was helping old Tom, was altogether beyond Binks; in vain did Tom plead, explain, beg. Binks was firm; and when the bell rang, he seemed relieved to end what had been a trying interview both to himself and Tom. Imagine, therefore, the astonishment and amaze of young Thomas when, a few days later, Binks offered him work. At first he could not get the idea out of his mind that Binks only wanted to catch him and flog him for his father's sins; but after a time Tom and Mrs. Harvey persuaded him to accept it, and poor Thomas was in such distress for work of some kind that he took the work, and returned home to tell his mother the joyful news, as we have already seen.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MARLOWE HALL.

THE sun was shining brightly through the trees of the long avenue leading to Marlowe Hall—shining, too, into the dim old library, in one corner of which sat Tom's grandfather. The old man sat in an old, velvet arm-chair, his legs crossed, a pipe in his mouth, and a newspaper in his hands. But he had forgotten his spectacles, and he could not see to read a single word. He wanted to read the news very much too, but he had not sufficient energy or spirit to go and look for them. So he sat there puffing away slowly at his pipe, till the butler entered the room with a message.

"Ashton, my glasses," he said, heedless of the message.

And the butler disappeared to hunt for glasses which were *always* lost.

"I can't help thinking that is *our* Master Tom," he murmured to himself, as he hunted in his master's pockets for the missing glasses. "I'm not sure as I won't show it to master, and risk his being angry." And then he used an expression about these lost spectacles that was worthy of Paradise Street itself.

He looked in the dining-room; they were not there. Then he went to his pantry, and out of a drawer smelling of old pipes and stale tobacco he took a newspaper, *The Marlowe and Eastford Local Gazette*, dated a week before. He opened it and read over again a certain paragraph. It was headed, "Great Fire in Biffen Road. Gallant rescue of proprietor. Terrible sufferings of the hero. Local interest attached." With his own spectacles on, Ashton read and re-read the paragraph. Then his great mind was made up. He took off his own spectacles, in which he never appeared upstairs, and was slipping them into his pocket, when he was startled to find a pair already there.

He must have taken up his master's by accident last night. Yes, now he remembered, he had sat up reading *The Times* after his master had left the dining-room, and his master's glasses were so much stronger and better than his own.

Well, he had found them ; it didn't much matter where. And with the glasses and local newspaper in hand Ashton re-entered the library.

Old Mr. Courton accepted the glasses without inquiry, and Ashton felt himself silently dismissed. When he reached the door he turned round.

"Will you excuse my speaking, sir?" he began respectfully, "but there's a paragraph in last week's *Local Gazette* I can't rightly make out. It seems as if—Master Tom, sir."

The old man frowned. Ashton had been very partial to the boy, and had several times committed the indiscretion of mentioning his name. Mr. Courton held out his hand for the local paper, and put his spectacles upon his nose.

"Here it is, sir," said Ashton, pointing out the sensational paragraph ; and he stood with his arms akimbo while his master read. He watched his face somewhat anxiously, but no change of expression could he detect. He fidgeted uneasily about the room, put the books straight on the table, drew the blinds down a little to keep out the sun, and returned to his master's side.

The *Local Gazette* had fallen to the ground, and the old man's eyes were fixed on the opposite wall ; he had taken off his glasses.

"Well, sir?" observed Ashton interrogatively.

"Well," answered the old man as one in a dream. "It seems he is in the hospital, and he couldn't be in a safer place."

All Ashton's better feelings stirred within him.

"You think it is Master Tom, sir—*our* Master Tom?" he cried, the blood mounting to his face.

"Undoubtedly," observed the old man calmly.

"And—and, sir, you'll excuse my making so bold, but—but you intend leaving him there?" cried Ashton, aghast.

"Undoubtedly," repeated the old man in the same icy tones.

Then all Ashton's distant respect and reverence for the master he had served so long left him. Without leaving himself time to reflect on the result of his conduct, he burst forth from the fullness of his full heart,—

"Mr. Courton, sir, I don't know how to believe it. Our Master Tom in hospital, and you and I to know it, and not take no steps to save him. Master Tom perhaps ill and dying, for all *we* know, and we not raise a finger to help him. O sir, I have known him from a baby, and loved him as my own; let me go and see him, and—bring him 'ome again."

Tears stood in Ashton's eyes, and his voice shook with emotion. But the old man seemed unmoved. He made no answer. And Ashton, suddenly realizing what he had done, silently withdrew from the room.

The local newspaper lay at the old man's feet. Slowly he picked it up, walked across the library to the window, put on his glasses, and read the paragraph once more. Then he sank down into a chair.


"Tom, Tom!" he murmured; and his glasses grew very dim. Then there was a long silence. Only the old clock ticked the long minutes away; not another sound fell on the old man's ears. Presently his lips moved again.

"The sins of the fathers are visited on the children—ay, and on the children's children."

Another pause. Then slowly and deliberately he rose and rang the bell.

"Ashton," he said, in the ordinary clear voice in which he always gave his orders, "order the carriage at half-past two, and pack my bag for one night."

Ashton withdrew silently from the room, and carried out his instructions. He had put in his master's clothes, when suddenly he paused, for an idea had struck him. He went briskly to the little



room where Tom used to sleep, and where all his belongings still were. Taking a second bag, he packed in it an old suit of Tom's clothes, a clean shirt, a few clean collars, socks, shoes. Then he smiled to himself as he took a pipe down from the rack over the little bedroom mantelpiece.

"That were a favourite of Master Tom's," he said to himself with a chuckle. Then he strapped up the little bag and carried it down to the hall to await the carriage.

"Ye're a bold man, Ashton," he said to himself; "and ye'll be going a bit too far one day with the old master."

Not a word passed between master and servant till the carriage was at the door.

"I shall be at the Charing Cross Hotel one night, possibly two," he said, as Ashton was closing the carriage door. "You have packed things for a night?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ashton. "You have two bags in, sir."

Mr. Courton only frowned at the volunteered information, and the carriage drove down the long avenue on its way to the Eastford station, some four miles distant.

It was a rare event this. Mr. Courton left home very seldom, and Ashton was closely questioned as to the object of this suddenly-planned visit to London. But Ashton held his peace. Only his face wore a curious smile on it all that afternoon, and it was noticed by the other servants that he spent a long time in "Master Tom's" old room, which they could not explain.

Meanwhile old Mr. Courton was hastening to London. An odd smile flitted over his wrinkled face from time to time. Then a look of weary sadness would cross over it, as he murmured to himself, "Perhaps he is dead even now, and I am too late—too late!"

The following morning Tom was sitting up in the ward in an easy-chair. He was wonderfully better and stronger, and the day was not far distant when he should be discharged. His future was constantly in his thoughts. What was he to do? where was he to go on his discharge?

True, Binks would give him work—he had no doubt of that; but he did not feel nearly strong enough for work at Binks's, for the scanty food that would entail, the long hours, and the hard work.

There was his grandfather. But no, he could not

go back to him poor, ragged, degraded, and ill. He would never have the courage to walk up that long, well-kept avenue at Marlowe Hall in his miserable rags; he would never have the courage to ring at that great front-door bell, and find himself face to face with the pompous Ashton. No, it was impossible, impossible!

What, then, was open to him? He felt in a state verging on despair when he let his thoughts revert to this subject. They were wandering round the subject now, when an extraordinary thing happened. A great fuss seemed to be going on at the door of the ward.

"Some new case coming in," thought Tom to himself; and so intent was he on his own despairing thoughts, that he never even looked round. Voices were heard, mumblings, mutterings, and expostulations. At last, however, the large door was opened, and all eyes were directed towards it.

An old man entered, attended by one of the doctors.

"A new patient," whispered some of the old patients from their beds. "But what a highly-respectable one; must be a paying patient."

Still Tom had not turned round.

"There he is, there, see," said a voice close beside him.

It was the voice of Tom's own doctor and Tom's own friend.

He looked round, and there, standing beside the doctor, stood his grandfather! There was his familiar face, his familiar expression—yes, his familiar coat and umbrella, for he always carried his umbrella done up in a shiny cover in wet weather or in fine.

Tom was too taken aback to speak. He became deadly pale, for he was yet weak. He tried to stand up, but the doctor bade him sit still.

At last his grandfather spoke. He spoke as if to a child who had been naughty and must be punished.

"Tom," he said in his calm, clear voice, "you are coming home with me to-morrow."

Home! The very word sounded soothing to Tom. Home, home to Marlowe, to the old hall, to the old rooms, and haunts, and corners; up the long, leafy avenue; to sleep in his own little bed once more, to eat food for which he had not laboured. Was it possible? was this good news really for him? He looked up into the old wizened face eagerly, but as yet unbelieving.

"Yes, Tom," answered the doctor; "it is all right, my boy. Your grandfather has found you out, and he is going to take you back to-morrow for change of air, and you will soon be all right again."

He touched Mr. Courton on the shoulder.

"I must ask you to come away now," he said gently; "it is the patients' dinner-hour. You will see Tom to-morrow. We can make all necessary arrangements for his move downstairs."

Apparently with great reluctance, the old man moved a step or two away. Then he came back, and stooping down suddenly over Tom's white face, he kissed him. "To-morrow, Tom, to-morrow!" he whispered in a trembling voice, and without another look back he hurried away after the doctor, his shiny-covered umbrella held tightly in his hand. And all the way back to the hotel he muttered and mumbled to himself, not once, but again and again, as the desolation of the last few months rose before him,—

"I have found that which was lost."

Little enough sleep came to Tom at the hospital or to his grandfather at the Charing Cross Hotel that night. Something had come into both their lives; a change was at hand for both.

To Tom it seemed like the slow awakening from

a long and hideous dream. The great wide world into which he had launched some months before—was it possible he would wander in it no more alone and friendless? Was he going back to ease and luxury? He started as he thought of ease and luxury; it meant temptation—temptation as strong and stronger than ever assailed him in the public-houses in London. It meant rich wines set before him, especially now he was weak and ill, and he did not feel as if he had the strength to resist them. O God, for strength to stand against it—not to sink to the level of Paradise Street, as so many had done! Then his thoughts went to little Billy. He would ask that Billy might come down into the country, and have the fresh air and food that might yet make him well. Mrs. Harvey should come too; they should get away from the horrid atmosphere of Paradise Street, and all should be well. A happy smile passed over his face, and he fell into a restless sleep for the last night in the hospital ward.

Punctually at two the following afternoon, his grandfather arrived at the great hospital doors in a comfortable carriage; and Tom, in the clothes Ashton had so thoughtfully provided for him, drove away to catch the afternoon train to Eastford for Marlowe

Hall. They spoke few words on that journey. Tom lay back in the corner of the railway-carriage with his eyes shut. He felt very weak and very tired, now he began to move about, and he was quite dazed with the long journey, though he was beginning to dread the arrival. It was not till they had driven some three miles of the distance between Eastford station and Marlowe Hall that Tom burst forth. He had felt all the way like the prodigal son coming home again, the poor erring boy returning to his father's house—returning so guilty, so humbled, so longing for forgiveness and love.

And as the carriage drove in at the lodge gate and began to pass along the leafy avenue, through which the late afternoon sun was glinting, he cried out his thoughts aloud,—

“Father, I have sinned, I have sinned!”

The old man looked round, startled at the sudden breaking of their long silence.

“All right, boy, all right,” he muttered huskily. “Here we are, nearly home now; and I forgot to tell Ashton to get your room ready.”

They drove on up the long avenue, and neither spoke again, only the old man's thoughts somehow followed out the old story of the prodigal son, and


the words went round and round in his thoughts—"was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

Half shyly Tom slunk behind his grandfather as the carriage swept up to the hall door. He felt afraid to face the pompous Ashton. He need not have been afraid. There is no deeper and truer affection to be found on this earth than that felt by old and faithful servants for their master's family. Ashton was no exception. The smile that covered his face was *nothing* to the feelings which threatened to choke him, and the indescribable longing he felt to throw his arms about "Master Tom" and welcome him home again.

As it was, he remembered the dignity of his situation, and tried to satisfy himself by smiling unrestrainedly, and hoping "Master Tom" found himself well.

"Ashton," said old Mr. Courton, when they had got inside the hall and the door was shut, "you had better see that Master Tom's room is got ready, and have a fire lit there at once."

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied Ashton, with a smile which threatened to extend from ear to ear, "but there is a good fire burning in Master Tom's room."



Then, as if to excuse the forwardness of his behaviour, he added that the room had felt so damp and cold, he sometimes had a fire there to keep it aired.

Mr. Courton was too much pleased to show any displeasure at Ashton's plans, and the two old men marched Tom off to his little bedroom in silence.

"Master Tom has been ill," said Mr. Courton, as the old servant was preparing to depart. "You will attend to him carefully, Ashton."

"Yes, sir," answered Ashton.

He never remembered a prouder moment in his life.


And so Tom came home again.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY.

THE same sun that was shining through the leafy avenue of Marlowe Hall was shining, though gloomily, into Paradise Street. It seemed to have lost half its radiance by the time it had penetrated into the thickly-populated London streets, though, if the truth were known, its radiance was badly enough wanted there, badly enough wanted in Mrs. Harvey's little, dark room on the shady side of the street.

Billy was worse. The long summer in the stuffy street, the hot nights and hotter days, the want of fresh, pure air had told on his feeble strength, and now he could seldom get up. Mrs. Harvey was stitching, stitching still with a despairing diligence that made one's heart ache. She was thinking of the day, which could not now be far distant, when there would be no one to stitch for, no little precious life



depending on the weekly money she earned from Binks, and her heart was very heavy.

"Mother!" She started as the little voice fell on her ear.

He was still with her; yes, he was still with her. Let her thank God while she yet may.

"Mother, I do want to see Tom."

Mrs. Harvey rose from her work and went over to sit on the bed, where the child lay.

"But poor Tom is too ill to come yet," she said sadly, for it was nearly a fortnight since she had seen him.

"Couldn't I go to Tom?" asked the child wearily.

"Do you think you could bear it, Billy?" asked his mother, brightening a little at the mere suggestion. He must be feeling better to think of it. Perhaps he was getting better. He might yet live.

It was visiting day too. Filled with joy, Mrs. Harvey ran across to borrow a perambulator in which she had sometimes taken him out. Carefully she made up a bed in it with pillows and a blanket off her own bed. Billy had not been dressed for some weeks, and the dressing was a painful process. But the child had such an intense yearning to see Tom, that he bore it almost without a groan; and at

last she had carried him down the rickety stairs, and laid him in the old perambulator.

There was a new joy in her heart as she wheeled him down the street. He had so few pleasures in his sad, little life that it was quite delightful to be able to give him one. Nevertheless it seemed a long way to the hospital, and Billy was very tired long before they arrived there.

"How pleased Tom will be to see him!" thought Mrs. Harvey to herself as she got near. "He must be wondering what has become of us by this time."

At last they arrived, and Mrs. Harvey asked the hall-porter if she could visit the ward where Tom lay.

"Tom Courton?" asked the porter.

"Yes, that's him," answered Mrs. Harvey joyfully; "and may I just leave the perambulator in the hall here and carry up my little boy?"

"But, my good woman, he's gone," said the porter, looking at her.

"Gone? Impossible!" said Mrs. Harvey, astonished beyond words. "He couldn't be discharged yet. You are thinking of another."

"Tom Courton, admitted badly burnt, six weeks last Tuesday; that's him all right. Well, he's discharged, I tell you. It ain't no good your going up to the ward."

"Gone! Gone!" repeated Mrs. Harvey, in despair. "Discharged! And only yesterday! I cannot understand it. O Billy, Billy, what shall we do?"

She dreaded the effect this bad news might have on the child—the long, tiring drive, and the bitter disappointment at the end of it. But Billy seemed to take little notice; he only lay back on his pillow with his white eyelids closed. He neither cried nor spoke.

"And have you no idea where he went?" asked Mrs. Harvey in agonizing suspense.

"What do you take me for?" asked the hall-porter. "Do you think *I* can remember the name and address of each discharged patient, and whether they go away in a carriage and pair or a wheelbarrow? Next case."

And Mrs. Harvey was dismissed.

Feeling utterly forlorn, she turned away from the great hospital door and turned in the direction of Paradise Street.

Where had Tom gone to? Why had he not just called round to see Billy, or written a line to say what he was doing and where he was going? It was so unlike him. But where was he? Had he gone back to the old life, to the temptation, to the drink? Was it possible his grandfather had found him, or had

written? or had Tom taken it into his head to go back to Marlowe? Well, she could not tell. Perhaps she would never hear now. Only Billy was disappointed, she knew that, and she felt the blow might almost kill him. He lay very quiet as she wheeled him through the noisy streets between Charing Cross Hospital and Paradise Street, and he still did not speak as she lifted him out at her own door and carried him upstairs. Only as she lifted him into his little bed did a moan escape him, and he turned his white face to the wall with a muffled cry—"Tom, Tom, come back to Billy."

That night was a very bad one. The child was feverish and excited. Toward morning he fell into an exhausted sleep, but his mother could only sit and watch beside him. Her mind was too full of disappointment and anxiety to close her eyes.

In the morning an unusual thing happened. The postman stopped at Mrs. Harvey's door and left her a letter. She turned it over and looked at the post-mark. It was Marlowe. For one instant her heart stood still. It was long since any letter had come to her from Marlowe. Then, in an agony, she tore it open. Marlowe Hall was at the top of the letter, and she ceased her trembling.

And this was how the letter ran in Tom's clear handwriting:—

“DEAR MRS. HARVEY,—I was unable to let you know of my sudden discharge from the hospital two days ago. I only hope you did not take the trouble of going to see me last visiting day. You will wonder how I got here. My grandfather found me out—I have not yet discovered how—and came and fetched me home the day before yesterday. I am feeling better, but some way from strong yet. I am most anxious to hear about Billy, and my grandfather says I may ask you to bring him down here for country air. I do hope you will do this. I will write again when I have spoken to Ashton about it. My grandfather says he can find an empty cottage on the estate. Of course you will have no expense, and you must do it for the sake of the little chap. I can never, never thank you sufficiently for all your great kindness to me, nor can I ever repay it. I know the least I can do for you is to try and get Billy well. I enclose you a stamped envelope to tell me if Billy is well enough to move down here, and I remain your faithful friend,

“TOM COURTON.”

For a moment she closed her eyes, as if to shut out thoughts that would arise. Anywhere but to Marlowe she would go. But back there, where she had endured such untold misery—there she felt she could not go. She looked from the letter to Billy and from Billy back to the letter. The child was asleep now. How the blue veins stood out on his temples! how deadly white was his skin, how wasted his little face! Even in sleep his little forehead was contracted in a frown, and an expression of pain was engraven on his otherwise peaceful face. Country air, pure country air for Billy! Was there yet a hope she might keep him? was it possible the longed-for help had not come too late? She pictured the little sleeping form with health and strength—the drawn face free from pain, the white cheeks rosy and fresh. What were her feelings compared with the good of her child? She must go! She would go! Should she yet have the desire of her life?

“O God, spare him to me!” burst almost involuntarily from her lips.

The child moved in his sleep. She passed over to him, the letter in her hand.

“Billy,” she said very gently.

He did not move. It seemed as if he was too tired.

"Billy," she said again, "mother has heard from Tom."

At the mention of the word Tom, the child opened his eyes and gazed at her with a pathetic wonder.

"Tom is getting well, and he is gone into the country, and he wants Billy and me to go too," she said with a smile.

"Billy wants Tom to come," murmured the child.

"But Tom cannot come here; we shall go to him," said the happy mother; and then she told him in her joy of the green fields and the blue sky, of the great trees with their leaves, of the flowers he would pick, and the beautiful things he would see, until even the child smiled at last.

"Billy will go to that pretty country," he whispered at last. "He's too tired to-day, but to-morrow—to-morrow Billy will go."

"We must wait for another letter from Tom; perhaps it will not come to-morrow or the day after, but it will come soon, and then mother and Billy will start off for the pretty country, and the green fields, and the blue sky, and Billy will grow so well and strong again, and mother will be happy—so happy," she said, as with a bursting heart she kissed the precious little lips. The disappointment of the day

before was forgotten—all was forgotten in the one great joy that had been produced by Tom's letter.

As the day passed on, even Billy grew brighter as hour after hour his mother painted to him the glories of Marlowe.

"Why did us ever leave and come to Paradise Street?" he asked wistfully at last.

Mrs. Harvey reddened. She looked away from the child.

"But why did us *ever* leave the green fields and trees?" he repeated wonderingly.

She had never told the child of his father. The story of her life, of his life, was locked in her heart only. She could not tell him now on this happy day. She could not mar his joy and her joy by the story of evil-doing.

"It had to be, Billy, it had to be," she answered, looking into the dreary little room. And the child accepted her explanation without asking any further questions. He was always under the impression that his father was dead, and it was better so.

The evening wore on, and darkness had set in, when young Thomas Thorn ran in after his work to have a chat, as he often did, "to keep himself out of mischief," as he said.

"Thomas, Thomas, Billy's goin' to the country!" cried the sick child, stretching out his arms.

Young Thomas stood still in the doorway.

"Wha-a-at?" he said slowly.

"Goin' into the country to Tom," repeated Billy, his large eyes dancing, and an unusual flush on his white face.

The astonished Thomas looked at Mrs. Harvey for explanation.

"Yes, Thomas," she said gladly, "Billy and I are going off to Marlowe to Tom—Master Tom, we must call him now."

Thomas looked blank. Not a trace of joy appeared on his face; he simply stood staring vacantly, first at Mrs. Harvey, and then at Billy.

"Come, Thomas, aren't you glad for us?" asked Mrs. Harvey at last.

"No," blurted out young Thomas, with trembling lips.

"But Billy is going to get better; he will grow strong and well," said Mrs. Harvey confidently. "You must be glad for us, Thomas. Come in and hear all about it."

Then young Thomas made a great effort and spoke.

"Are you going away—for ever?" he asked, with something of a smothered choke in his voice.

"Oh no," answered Mrs. Harvey, smiling still. "We must come back again when Billy is well. I could not earn money at Marlowe. We are only going on a visit to Master Tom."

The cloud lifted. The boy could not enter into the joy of Mrs. Harvey, or the excitement of Billy. To him, the tragedy of their going away swallowed up all else. Perhaps Mrs. Harvey had no idea what she had been to the boy, what she had been to his mother.

"Aren't you glad *now*, Thomas?" asked Mrs. Harvey.

"No," repeated the boy, sitting down beside Billy; "I can't get on without you and the little chap, missus."

Then a light dawned on Mrs. Harvey.

"Oh yes, you will," she answered brightly, for her mind was too full of pleasure to be easily cast down; "and we shall come back again, and Billy will be rosy and well, and you will be getting higher wages."

But young Thomas shook his head disconsolately, and could get no satisfaction out of the accounts of Marlowe and its green fields, its great elms and broad avenues.

Billy slept peacefully that night, and dreamt of the

beautiful country to which he was going ; and it was all much more beautiful than ever he had imagined, for the sun was a great ball of pure gold, such as he had never seen, and the light blinded him so that he could not see his mother, till he grew frightened, and awoke in the middle of the night crying, and stretching out his arms to make sure she was there beside him.

“ Mother, you are coming too ? ” he half sobbed.

“ Yes, Billy, darling,” she said confidently, “ mother is coming too.”

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE POACHER'S STORY.

"ASHTON," said Tom, a few days after his arrival at Marlowe, when he was lying somewhat wearily on the sofa, and Ashton was setting beef-tea by his side, and doing all that a devoted servant could do—"Ashton, I want you to tell me all you know about a certain Mrs. Harvey, who once lived here on my grandfather's estate for a short time. Wasn't Harvey an under-keeper, and didn't something happen to him?"

"Yes, Master Tom," answered Ashton. "It was a pretty bad business that, and I often wondered what became of his poor young wife and baby. They said it would be crippled for life, but more likely it 'ud die, I think. Do you remember the night, Master Tom, when Harvey was caught poaching?"

"No," replied Tom, rather wearily; "I was away at

school, and I only heard of it from my grandfather in the holidays. I can't remember the rights of the case, and I should be interested to hear them. I will tell you the reason when you have told me the story."

"It is seven years ago come Christmas-time," began Ashton, "that the affair happened. Harvey had only been under-keeper a year. He had married a respectable enough young woman that your grandfather knew before, from a neighbouring village, and he took on the man Harvey as under-keeper after Hooker left. They had a cottage—you know the one, Master Tom, where Baynes lives now—and the keeper, Sparrow, you know, rather took a fancy to Harvey, and thought he would do well. He worked well with the rearing, and they hardly lost a bird that year, Sparrow said, though he didn't seem over-steady. Still he was all right at the work, and, as Sparrow said, it wasn't no concern of his what happened outside the work, and he couldn't be responsible for whether a man kicked his wife at home. But once Mrs. Harvey told Mrs. Sparrow that he behaved shamefully, and it's a horrid story of how he went on after his child was born. It was a healthy little thing, so they said; but he got jealous

over it, and said she gave it more attention than she gave him. One day he came in the worse for drink, they say"—Tom gave an involuntary shudder—"and he seized the child from her and then fell with it."

Again Tom shuddered and turned deadly white.

"Not feeling quite the thing, are you, Master Tom?" asked Ashton anxiously.

"Yes, go on," murmured Tom. "It's a sickening story, but I must hear it. Oh, what that woman went through!"

"Mrs. Sparrow advised her to leave him, but she wouldn't. She said if she left him he was bound to grow worse; if she stayed, in course of time she might help him."

"But the child?" gasped Tom.

"The child was badly hurt, though no limbs were broken. Only from that day they said it ailed and was never the same again, and when she left here I heard it was not expected to live."

"Poor little Billy!" murmured Tom, in a broken voice.

"It was some time in December when things reached a crisis," continued Ashton. "Sparrow told me he had suspected Harvey once or twice of dis-

honesty about the birds' food, but he could never lay his hand exactly on it, so could not speak. Still he had kept a sharp lookout on him for some weeks before the poaching affair. That was on the fifth of December, I remember. It was a dark night, and Sparrow had an uneasy feeling of things going wrong. He had been warned that Harvey had been out several nights, and on this particular night he resolved to go out himself and see if it was true or only gossip. He went, and the two men met face to face. Harvey had another man with him, a notorious poacher; but the night was dark, and while Sparrow turned his lantern on them, they could not see him. They shot, and Sparrow fell wounded in the leg. Then they made off. But Sparrow had warned the police, and both men were caught. You must remember the rest, Master Tom. Sparrow was found and attended to. He was badly hurt, and was in the hospital for some weeks. The men were tried, and sentenced to seven years."

"And the wife and child?" asked Tom.

"Went away, no one knew where. They said she would not go to her home—she was too ashamed of him; and nobody about here knows to this day where she went. There was great sympathy for her, and

Mr. Courton would have done something for her had she stayed ; but she left no address—just went off, she and the child.”

“Thank you,” said Tom, as Ashton finished, and was preparing deferentially to leave the room. “I think my grandfather has told you to send down a little furniture to furnish a room in the old cottage in the gardens.”

“Yes, Master Tom ; I am seeing about it to-day.”

“Be sure it is nice and clean and very warm,” Tom continued. “Mrs. Harvey and her child are coming there next week.”

Ashton turned, and his astonishment almost made Tom smile.

“Mrs. Harvey, Master Tom ! If it’s not taking a liberty, may I ask where she is coming from ?”

It was time for Tom’s story now, and Ashton listened to the outlines of it in wrapt attention.

“The child is terribly crippled,” he ended, “but I am in hopes that country air may do him good and the good food he ought to have. Poor little Billy ! It will be nice to see him happy and stronger.”

Ashton did not display any marked feelings. He only said with his usual severe and deferential air, as he was leaving the room,—

"We will make them as comfortable as we can, sir."

"So that's the story, is it?" said Tom, half to himself, when he was left alone to his beef-tea and his own meditations. "That's the story Paradise Street was all agog to hear, and that's Billy's father, the brute!" he exclaimed aloud. "Fully six years in prison, and less than a year to serve, some of which will be let off on good behaviour. Where will he go then? Anyway, they're safe from him at Marlowe, for he would never come here to look for them, and they'll be back in London before he gets out probably, and Paradise Street is safe enough."

Tom himself superintended the arrangements in the cottage for Mrs. Harvey's reception. Large fires were kept burning all day, for it had been standing empty some little time owing to a curtailment of expenses on the Marlowe estate. A small crib was provided for Billy, and Tom insisted on a little wheel-chair being hired, so that the child could get fresh air. All was done that could possibly be done for them.

"And yet," Tom would say at intervals, "they have done more than this for me. I can never repay what, out of all her poverty, she gave me, and the

helping hand she alone stretched out when I was sinking deeper and deeper every day."

When the looked-for letter at last arrived in Paradise Street, saying that all was now ready for them, Mrs. Harvey once more turned sick at the thought of returning to Marlowe. It was only her intense love for the child that made the idea possible to her, and for his sake she would face anything—anything. The past all rose up vividly before her. How would the people about the place receive her? Were there many left who would remember her, remember Harvey, remember the poor little baby that she bore away in the darkness of the night, alone, ashamed of the disgrace that her husband had brought upon her—the irretrievable wrong he had done the child? She went through again all she had gone through then—the loneliness, the misery, the want. She could hear again the baby wailing in its pain, and again she almost cursed her husband's name in her heart. She must go back to the scene of all this, but nothing must urge her to stay. In less than a year Harvey would be loose on the world again, and where should he seek her but at Marlowe? No, no, she must never, never let him see the child again. Rather live and die in Paradise Street than that.

This was the train of her thoughts when a tap at the door announced the arrival of Mrs. Thorn. She was looking very ill, and her face bore visible signs of great suffering. She came in, and almost tottered to a chair.

"What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Harvey, anxiously looking up. She had been so intent with her own thoughts that she had scarcely noticed the look of agony in Mrs. Thorn's face.

"Keep me, keep me," moaned Mrs. Thorn. "The crave for drink is on me, and I dare not trust myself alone. I have kept steady for five weeks, and now—now—I feel I *must*—"

"Let me make you some tea," said Mrs. Harvey. "There, a hot cup will do you good, and we will talk and think of other things. See, Billy is so bright to-day; you know the reason."

Yes, Mrs. Thorn knew the reason well enough. Every one in Paradise Street knew it by this time, and many and strange were the stories afloat about Mrs. Harvey and Billy.

Some treated the news of their going with indifference, but most treated it with genuine sorrow. Somehow her influence was felt throughout Paradise Street. The children were accustomed to run in

and out to see Billy. At first they came shyly, brought by the young Thorns; then they took to coming alone, and staying longer and longer. It often amused Billy to have them, and anything that passed away the weary days for him was welcomed by his mother.

So the sorrow was wide-spread, for still Paradise Street dwelt more largely on its own loss than on another's gain. It was a hard lesson to learn unselfish love—the desire to see others well and happy—and they had not learnt it yet.

But none would miss them like the Thorns. Their lives had indeed been happier since Mrs. Harvey had become their friend, and poor Mrs. Thorn was feeling now how deeply she should miss the woman to whom she could appeal for help in her hours of great temptation.

“There’s only one thing I want you to promise afore I say good-bye,” said Mrs. Thorn, as she moved towards the door. “You will come back again—come back here to Paradise Street?”

Her voice trembled, and her words were uttered with pathetic earnestness.

Mrs. Harvey looked at her, and then she looked at Billy.

"Yes," she answered in a low voice. "Yes, Mrs. Thorn; I will come back."

And she kept her word. No one else would want her when Billy was gone. She would come back to No. 26, and live for those whom she might be able to help, even those who were struggling to live better lives in poor Paradise Street.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### TOO LATE.

IT was a glorious October day when Tom started in his grandfather's closed carriage to meet Mrs. Harvey and Billy at the station. Though the day was not cold, considering the time of year, the carriage was full of shawls, rugs, and hot-water bottles for the sick child. Tom was in a state of suppressed excitement, and as the carriage rolled quietly down the now almost leafless avenue, he could hardly repress his impatience. He took out his watch and looked at it half a dozen times to make sure that he was not late for the train. Whatever happened, Billy must not be kept waiting at the station. But the old coachman knew his times and his roads well enough, and there was no danger of being late.

The sun, which had been shining radiantly all day, was beginning to go down, leaving traces of its

glory in the clear sky. The flat country around was beginning to look bare and leafless, for the beauty of the summer had passed.

Tom looked out of the window. He wondered how it would all strike Billy, the London child who had never seen the beautiful country since infancy. Would he find it dull? He had plenty of people in Paradise Street to run in and out all day; here there was no one, except perhaps a few neighbours who might look in out of curiosity to see Harvey's child. Then his mind passed on to Harvey. When would he come out, and what would he do then? Would he try and find his wife and child? Then an idea flashed across his mind. Perhaps the sight of the child would bring him to his senses. How would it be to send a police-court missionary to look out for him, and report privately to him his impression of the man? Tom was just beginning to work out the pros and cons, when the carriage stopped at the little country station.

There was yet some time to wait before the train was due. The little branch line was dependent on the main line to and from London, and was not given to being overpunctual. So Tom strode impatiently up and down the little platform.

He did not look overstrong yet, and there were many scars on his forehead yet to be seen, though he had wonderfully improved since leaving the hospital. Good food and fresh air were doing wonders to counteract the long months of poverty and want which he had endured while at Mrs. Harvey's, and the yet greater strain he had suffered before she found him.

But see! there was the signal going down. Tom could already see the white smoke lying in a long line across the flat country. Another minute or two and the bustling little train was coming round the curve and puffing into the small station. Tom looked eagerly into each carriage as it passed, first, second, and third, but he could not catch sight of the familiar face. He was prepared to carry Billy to the carriage. But no Billy could he see. At last he caught sight of Mrs. Harvey, but she was so intent on moving the sick child that she took no note of Tom. There seemed to be quite a little crowd round the carriage door, and a good deal of talking and fuss. Into the midst of them Tom strode, and gently pushing aside the talkers, he stepped into the railway carriage.

There lay Billy wrapt in shawls, his eyes closed.

Was he asleep? Was he, perchance, dead? Tom dared not think. Lifting the helpless burden in his arms, as gently as a woman could have done, he stepped out of the carriage.

"Poor little dear;" "There, there;" "Well, to be sure." Such exclamations as these fell on his ear, uttered by sympathetic fellow-travellers on that branch line as the seemingly lifeless little form was borne from their sight.

"Follow me," Tom said firmly to Mrs. Harvey, who was crying bitterly now, partly from anxiety and partly from relief at feeling the child was in those strong, loving arms.

"O Master Tom, he's so bad!" she half sobbed as she tried to keep pace with those rapid strides.

But Tom did not answer. His heart was wrung with pity. "Here we are," he said as they reached the carriage.

The ticket collector stood at the door holding it open. He was mystified at Tom Courton's curious companions.

"Get in and sit down there," said Tom to Mrs. Harvey, nodding at the little seat. "I shall hold him as he is."

He followed her in and sat down, never moving

the little bundle in his arms except just to lower it on to his knees.

"Give me the hot-water bottle," he said presently. "Put it to his feet, and rub them gently with your hand."

They were so busy trying to bring the child round that Mrs. Harvey had no time to notice the surrounding country; familiar objects, well-known cottages passed by, all unnoticed. *Her* world seemed passing too. What mattered anything? Once only she looked up. Her eye fell on a little pond by the roadside. She shuddered involuntarily. It looked so cold and sun-forsaken.

"He will come round when we get him into the house; see, we are nearly there," he added, glancing out of the window. "It was too much for him, the journey. He is like ice. Here, chafe his hands a little. Thank Heaven, here is the cottage. Here, I will get out first."

As he moved again, a moan came from the little bundle, and the mother smiled in her joy. A nameless fear had been taking possession of her during the journey. That fear was gone now. All would yet be well.

The little cottage looked cheery enough. A bright

fire burned in the hearth, the table was laid with a spotless white tablecloth, tea was set, and the kettle was boiling on the hob.

"O Master Tom!" involuntarily burst from Mrs. Harvey.

"Better than Paradise Street, isn't it?" said Tom, with a sickly smile, as he sat down on a wooden chair in front of the fire.

"Here, we'd better take off these shawls and just warm him up a bit by the fire," he said, and Mrs. Harvey obeyed like a child.

"Now, just rub the life back into him. He looks pretty bad, poor little chap."

"Billy," he whispered, "can't you perk up a bit? Don't you know Tom?"

The words seemed to act like magic. Like one awakening from a deep sleep the child struggled back to consciousness. He opened his eyes with an effort. Tom bent down over him.

"See, Billy, it's Tom," he whispered again.

A look of bewilderment passed over the little white face. Then, like the bursting of the sun through a cloud, a smile lit up the pain-drawn features; and stretching out a wasted arm, "Tom," he murmured painfully, "Tom—come back to Billy."

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The smile on Tom's face threatened to extend from ear to ear as he looked across at Mrs. Harvey. She was kneeling beside Billy.

"Yes," she whispered, "Billy has come to Tom."

Presently he spoke again.

"Billy's going to the beautiful country," he murmured.

"He's there," whispered his mother. "This is the beautiful country."

But Billy shook his head sorrowfully, and again closed his eyes.

"We had better get him to bed," said Mrs. Harvey; "he rests better so. He is just tired out with the journey. I will give him a little tea, Master Tom, and let him sleep. He'll be more himself to-morrow."

"I think I will be going back now to the house," said Tom. "I will send the housekeeper down a little later to see if you want anything. And should you want the doctor, there is a Mrs. Smith next door whose little boy would go for him. But I hope Billy will sleep to-night, and you, too, for the matter of that."

But little enough sleep did Mrs. Harvey get that night. It was all so strange and new, and yet all so

old. The inside of the cottage was exactly like the one she had lived in when Billy was born. The extreme stillness almost overwhelmed her ; she missed the bustle and roar of Paradise Street, the shouts and cries that went on far into the night.

At first Billy had sunk into a deep sleep, but as the night advanced he grew restless. He could not understand where he was, but kept throwing his arms about and talking wildly of affairs in Paradise Street and young Thomas Thorn. After a time he grew quieter.

"Billy has seen Tom," he whispered, throwing his arms round his mother. "And Tom will take him to the beautiful country and green fields."

"But Billy is in the beautiful country now, and the green fields are all around him," urged his mother in a whisper.

But again Billy shook his head sorrowfully.

"No, no," he answered, "us'll go there to-morrow."

Meanwhile Tom returned to his grandfather.

"Well," said the old man from behind his newspaper, "did they come all right?"

"Yes," answered Tom, somewhat wearily ; "I don't know about 'all right.' The little chap was pretty near gone, I think, when he arrived. I'm a bit

afraid we have moved him too late to do much good, grandfather."

"What do you mean? You don't think he's going to die?"

"I do," said Tom gravely.

"Can nothing be done?" said his grandfather, laying down the paper as an unexpected crisis presented itself.

"No," answered Tom; "I fear, nothing. I will call in Dr. Tibbs to-morrow, but the child is sinking."

There was a pause. The old man puffed away at his pipe, and Tom closed his eyes wearily as he lay back in a large arm-chair opposite his grandfather. At last he spoke.

"Grandfather, what was your opinion of the man Harvey? Was he a thorough bad lot, or a decent sort of man led astray?"

Mr. Courton frowned.

"Not a bad sort," he answered presently. "I rather liked the man when he first came, but it seems he got into bad company and took to drinking. Why do you ask? He is safe in jail for some time to come."

"No, he isn't," answered Tom. "He has very nearly served his time, and I shouldn't wonder at his

being out any day, if he has behaved decently. I cannot make up my mind what to do about him. My inclination is to write to the police-court mission and get him looked after. But the question is whether to let him know of the whereabouts of his wife. Of course he ought to support her. If Billy were going to live, I should have no hesitation in keeping their address from him; but Billy—is dying,” added Tom in a broken voice, “and when he is gone the mother will have nothing to live for and nowhere to go. Her life is centered in the child, and she will assuredly break down completely when he is taken from her. If Harvey comes out of prison a better man than he went in, then all may yet be well, and she may be a comfort to him.”

Mr. Courton did not speak.

“It is a rash thing to do, Tom,” he said at last. “Would it not be better to leave him alone?”

“No, no,” cried Tom. “To leave a man alone in his temptation is to increase that temptation tenfold. I was left alone, and had it not been for Mrs. Harvey, poor and ignorant though she was, but with a good heart, I should be still struggling on in my low life. What she did for me by her kind words and her helping hand, no one will ever know. If

you know some one cares whether you live well or ill, it makes you ashamed. I must and will do what I can for Harvey. It may make a difference in his life at this crisis."

So saying, Tom left the library and went into his own little room upstairs, where he sat down at his writing-table to write two letters which cost him untold trouble. One was to the governor of the prison, asking particulars of Harvey's conduct while in jail, and when he would be discharged; the other to the police-court officer, to be on the lookout for the man and keep him from those who would tempt him again. They cost him much pains; and when he appeared at dinner, even his grandfather noticed how tired he seemed, and how utterly depressed in spirit.

"Ashton, give Master Tom a glass of old port," said his grandfather when they were seated at the table.

For a moment a fierce temptation seized Tom. How he longed for a glass of wine! It would put new life into him. He was tired out in mind and body, and in a state of listless indifference with regard to the world in general. What would one glass matter? He need have no more. It would

please his grandfather, too, for he hated to see Tom passing by his choice old wines.

But it was only for a moment. A sudden look of strong resolution passed over his face, and putting his hand over his glass, he said steadily,—

“No, thanks, grandfather. I shall be all right when I have had my dinner. The disappointment about the child has upset me foolishly.”

And so they fell to talking about other things; and by the time dinner was over Tom was as cheery again as possible, laughing and talking with his old grandfather, until the old man felt quite young again, and rejoiced more and more in the lad who had been lost and was found.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### HARVEY'S RETURN.

TWO days later, the letter from the governor of the prison where Harvey had been confined arrived. It was highly satisfactory. Harvey had behaved exceedingly well during his term of imprisonment, and had received all the rewards of good conduct. He had earned his freedom well, and would be let off the last few weeks. Tom ran his eye quickly toward the end of the letter. He caught the date of the prisoner's release. It was in two days' time. This was on Wednesday; Harvey would be a free man on Friday.

Tom's hand trembled as he put the letter back into its envelope. What had he done? Was he going to ruin two lives, or make two lives happy? Further, should he tell Mrs. Harvey about her husband, or not?

For a long time he sat thinking and wondering. He had no one whose advice or opinion he could rely on, no one to consult in this difficult matter, only his own experience and knowledge of mankind to guide him.

Finally he wrote a hurried answer to the governor, enclosing a letter to Harvey, telling him to meet him at the station on the Friday of his release. Further than this he could not see; all seemed mystified and blurred.

Then he took his cap, and whistling "Home, Sweet Home," he knew not why, he sauntered towards the cottage where Mrs. Harvey and Billy were living. The two days that had passed had brought no material change to the sick child. The doctor brought in by Tom the day after their arrival had given no hope. He was too far gone; the disease had taken a strong hold; the child was sinking, and no human power, no sunshine or green fields could save him now. And so Billy lay, hour after hour, across his mother's knees, noticing nothing except when Tom entered.

Though his eyes were closed, he seemed instinctively to know when Tom was present, and stretched out his wasted arms to touch him. Then Tom would

lift him gently from his mother's lap, and sit down in her chair by the fire, to give her the change of position she so much needed.

Mrs. Harvey, poor soul, would turn away to hide the burning tears she could no longer stay, and sometimes would gently open the cottage door and steal out into the radiant sunshine, there to wrestle with her sorrow alone.

And so the days passed slowly by ; they were long days, and yet longer nights. The neighbours were very kind, and she had no time to think of the past disgrace under which she had left Marlowe.

Friday came. All the morning Tom had been in the cottage. There was nothing to be done, only as long as the child clung to him he would not leave. He had said not a word to Mrs. Harvey about her husband. Once or twice he had tried, but the words died on his lips, and he felt it impossible at such a time.

It was with an anxious heart that he strode across the fields in the fading autumn afternoon to the little station, wondering if Harvey would turn up. He half hoped not ; then he felt it was a cowardly hope, for the sight of his dying child might have a lasting effect on him. He had not alluded to the wife and

child in his letter, thinking he would see the man first, and let that decide whether he should be allowed to see them or not. Possibly his freedom might have unbalanced him and his temptations proved too strong. Anyway, time would soon show now. The man would naturally come here where his home was, if he had repented in any sort of way.

The train came in, and sure enough the man Harvey got out—at least Tom made pretty sure from all accounts that this was the man Harvey. He looked rather sheepishly round him, as if somewhat afraid of recognizing some familiar face. Then Tom stepped forward.

"Harvey, I think?" he said a little shyly.

"Yes," answered the man in front of him, "I am Harvey."

"And you do not remember Mr. Courton's grandson?"

"Yes," answered the man again, "I do remember you."

"Come and walk a little way with me," said Tom, making for the highroad. "I want a little talk with you. Where do you purpose sleeping to-night?"

Harvey again looked furtively round.

"I thought of going to see whether they would let

me in at my father's house, but I doubt they will," he answered.

"How far is that?" asked Tom.

"Some eight miles or so," was the answer.

"And your wife?" asked Tom, almost below his breath.

Harvey started and changed colour.

"I don't suppose *she* wants to see me again," he said quickly. "'Tain't likely. I don't know where she is either, for the matter of that."

"Should you like to know where she is?" asked Tom.

Harvey hesitated, as if there were further questions he would like to ask, and had not got courage.

Tom seemed to divine his thoughts.

"She is in Marlowe," he suddenly burst forth, "watching her child. He is dying."

Harvey again started, and standing still, he seemed to tremble all over.

"Dying!" he gasped, and Tom felt he had never seen a man more frightened than Harvey was at that moment.

"Billy was his name," he said at last, like one in a dream.

"Yes," answered Tom, "Billy is his name."

"And his mother?" half gasped Harvey.

"She is breaking her heart over him," answered Tom, with a half sob in his voice.

Harvey lent against a gate for support. He was trembling violently.

"I have killed the child," he stammered out at last. "Do you know that?"

"Yes," answered Tom, "I do."

"And you think after that my wife will forgive me?"

"Yes," answered Tom, "I do."

There was silence between the two men. The country lay still in the autumn afternoon; a few late birds sang their evening song, and sank to rest. No one passed them. Each was full of his own thoughts.

"Master Tom," said Harvey at last, pulling himself together, and falling into the old familiar name by which Tom had ever been known on the estate, "I will do as you think best."

"Then come along," said Tom shortly.

And the two men walked along in silence together.

When they arrived outside the cottage, Tom stopped. He felt less sure of their reception than he had done some time before. Perhaps he had been

foolish in wishing to bring the man and wife together again. But he had such faith in Mrs. Harvey. Surely she would not turn from him in this hour, when she alone might help him. The only thing he feared was frightening Billy, though he felt Billy was already beyond that, sinking slowly as he was into unconsciousness.

"I will go in first. Stay here," he said peremptorily to the man.

He entered. The room was lit only by the dancing firelight. Billy was lying in bed now, and the figure of his mother kneeling beside him, her face buried in her hands, made Tom stand still for a moment. For one agonized moment he thought all was over. Then he saw the little form was breathing still. Very quietly he stole out, and taking Harvey lightly by the arm he drew him inside.

"Do not speak," he said, putting one finger on his lips.

Mrs. Harvey did not hear them enter; indeed, she was half asleep from sheer exhaustion of mind and body.

Tom looked at Harvey to see what effect the scene was having on him. It would have unnerved a stronger man.

Harvey bowed his head, and a sob escaped him. Mrs. Harvey moved, and Tom drew Harvey outside. The door was yet off the latch, when Tom alone advanced to the bedside.

"How is he?" he whispered anxiously.

She only shook her head for answer. Her face was deadly white. She had reached a climax beyond tears, and was very calm. Tom did not know how to begin. At last he said,—

"Mrs. Harvey, I want you to listen quietly to me. This little life is passing away. Another life has come to you for help: your husband is waiting for your forgiveness."

Little idea had Tom of the effect of his words.

Like a wounded tigress the woman sprang to her feet.

"Never, never!" she cried, clasping her hands together. "Send him away, send him away. Don't let him come near me. Master Tom, have pity; bar the door. I cannot—will not forgive."

Tom stood still. He had never seen such passion, such intensity of emotion before.

"But, Mrs. Harvey—" he began, hesitating.

"You do not know—O Master Tom, you do not know what he has done. See that little life. It is

his doing. *Can* a mother forgive such pain? Never, never!" she almost screamed, throwing herself down beside the bed. "Do not speak to me of him —while Billy lives."

Tom saw it was hopeless. He went outside. Harvey stood in the gathering darkness. His head was bent low, his hands trembled.

"You had better go home to-night," he said in a low voice. "I think she will see you to-morrow. He cannot last through another night. Come back again."

Tom suddenly grasped the trembling hand, and looking into the man's miserable face, he said, "Give me your word of honour, Harvey."

For answer the man looked up.

"I heard her words," he said, with a choking sob, and disappeared into the darkness.

Tom felt he could not bear to return to that sorrow-stricken room. He warned a neighbour to look in now and then, and sauntered back to the Hall. He felt he had muddled things somehow. He ought to have waited a bit. It was not the right moment to tell Mrs. Harvey; and he was disappointed in the way she had taken it.

"Never, never!" The passion of her words rang

in his ears. Did she mean it? Would she *never* forgive him? Must he go back to the old bad life again? And she? Tom shivered to think of what her life must be now. Then he fell to thinking of Billy. He recalled the last words he had stooped to catch from the sick child.

"Tom," he had whispered—"Tom, to-morrow we'll go to the beautiful country."

Ah, well, Billy would go, but not Tom.

And choking down a sob of disappointment, Tom began to whistle as he entered the brilliantly-lighted library at Marlowe Hall.

"You'll have tea brought back, Master Tom?" inquired Ashton with his deferential air.

"N-no," replied Tom casually. "I don't feel like tea to-night. Where's Mr. Courton?"

"He's looking for his spectacles, Master Tom," answered Ashton quite gravely. "They have led us a chase these last two hours and more."

"Oh, come along; I'll join the hunt," cried Tom, jumping up, glad enough to have a change for the current of his thoughts.

In less than five minutes the spectacles were upon his grandfather's nose.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### FORGIVEN.

THE first gleams of light were dawning over the silent country early the following morning when Billy's tired little life flickered away at last. A look of entire satisfaction took the place of the fretful suffering which had been there nearly all his life. Was he then content to go to his "beautiful country" alone, without the mother from whom he could not bear to be parted down here? It seemed so to her, and she chafed against it.

With a loneliness that amounted to pain she gazed at the little marble face, her own hardly less white. She seemed to have passed beyond all feeling, beyond all tears, beyond all hope. In stony silence she sat beside the little form she loved with all a mother's passionate love, heeding not the kind words of the neighbour who had watched with her through the last long night.

"The day is breaking. Go outside into the air," said the woman at last. "I will stay here."

"And leave *him*?" cried Mrs. Harvey.

"Yes," answered the neighbour, "leave him."

Mrs. Harvey turned her sorrow-stricken face towards the window. Rays of sunlight were already beginning to dance into the little room, mingling quaintly with the firelight and the candle now burning low on the little table.

At last she rose.

"Yes," she said indifferently, "I think I will go."

Slipping a shawl round her, she opened the door, and wandered listlessly out into the morning light. The air struck chill on her face, and she shivered. The dew lay thick on the long grass beside the road, and a slight breeze stirred the leafless branches of the trees overhead. Above and around little pink clouds floated about the dull sky, ushering in another day. But Mrs. Harvey was not accustomed to notice the sky or the sunrise. It was many a long year since she had seen sunrise, and she did not notice it now. She only wandered listlessly on along the hedge-girt road, seeing nothing, hearing nothing. Only the keen air revived her a little, though her legs trembled as she staggered on, she knew not, cared not where.

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She had not wandered far when she became conscious that she was not alone. The figure of a man was shadowing her. She had not the courage to turn; she had not the strength to escape.

"Sarah," said a voice—oh, how familiar!—"Sarah."

She put her hands over her eyes, and Tom's words sounded in her ears—"He is waiting for your forgiveness."

"Go!" she cried, without ever looking up. "Go away. Let me not look on you again."

"Only tell me one thing," he half moaned, "and I will go—go for ever. The child—how is it?"

"How is it?" she cried, with her breaking heart. "How is it? It is dead—dead."

Still she hid her face. And the little pink clouds grew pinker, passing into red. There was silence. At last Harvey spoke.

"And am I to go now, and for ever?" he asked in a choking voice. Something in the broken ring of it touched her. She looked up. Was there ever a more pitiable sight? Weary, sleepless, wan, Harvey looked a mere shadow of his former self. His clothes hung on him in folds, his head was bent, and his whole form betokened an attitude of sheer dejection.

"Am I to go, Sarah?" he said again, raising his head for a moment.

Their eyes met.

"Where will you go?" she asked stonily.

For answer he pointed to the river running darkly among the fields, not yet lit by the rising sun. Agony, despair, hopelessness, seemed to have taken entire possession of him. He had wandered about around the cottage all night, not daring to enter, not daring to go away. There, and there alone, as he well knew, lay his salvation.

If she turned him away now, his mind was made up. Things had turned out worse than he expected. If she disowned him now, he would plunge into that cold, dark river, and end his miserable life.

"Sarah," he cried piteously, "do not send me away. You have nothing left to live for, no one left to care for. Let me work for you again, and—and—"

He just stretched his arms in time to save her from falling to the ground. The strain had been too great, and a blessed unconsciousness had come to her relief.

When Tom came down next morning, he found her still in a semi-conscious state, realizing nothing, and recognizing nobody. Harvey was waiting on her,

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and watching for some return of life. He had accepted her silent consent to his return, and in a few words he related to Tom what the night had brought forth.

Tom's gladness showed signs of moving him to tears; he could only clutch Harvey convulsively by the hand, and murmur something about all coming right one day.

And truly all *did* come right. It was not till after Billy had been laid in a quiet corner of the little Marlowe churchyard that his mother awoke to life once more—awoke to find Harvey standing by her bedside. She had been half conscious of his presence for some time, but she seemed too tired to rouse herself from the lethargy into which she had fallen. Now Nature was once more asserting herself, and the woman was called on to live her life. And if one object of her life had been torn away, surely another had been sent.

Here was one craving her pity, her forgiveness, her love—ready to work out the past, and begin a new future for both of them. She had made up her mind to return to Paradise Street, to live among those who seemed to want her. Now she saw that this would be impossible. Could she turn away from the one

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who seemed to want her most of all? Could she withhold all that love and pity that seemed to have died with Billy? Could she live out her lonely life in the knowledge that she had left him, her husband, to a yet lonelier fate?

"Sarah." The familiar voice was broken. "*Must I go away?*"

She raised her eyes and looked at him, and all the love and pity she thought had gone rushed back to her.

"No, no," she whispered, with a smile that made the whole world look bright again. "Life is worth living yet. Let us forgive the past we can never forget, and begin our new life to-day—together."

THE END.

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